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AN ESSAY

ON

THE MORAL CONSTITUTION

AND

HISTORY OF MAN.

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PREFACE.

My only object in writing a Preface, is, to give a short account of the book. This purpose is so far superseded by the Table of Contents, to which the reader, or rather inspector, is referred; but consisting as it must, of detached particulars, there is room left for saying a few words, respecting the leading view by which its details are connected.

The object of the Essay is to show, that Mankind collectively, or Society, was destined to grow from infancy to maturity in the same way as individuals are; and that the due consideration of this truth, explains the origin of moral evil, the cause of its prevalence under varied forms and extent, and the means of its cure. This has been felt a perplexing subject hitherto; but the reason of such perplexity is accounted for, if our theory be just. The problem could not be solved till the facts were ascertained, and according to our view this could not be done *sooner*. In some respects, it is not yet fully done; but we may now see our way.

Another thing, connected with the actual progress of Society, is the means of its *education*, provided by Divine Providence in the different revelations he has given to mankind. These were completed, doctrinally, by Christianity; but the world being incapable at the first promulgation of the Christian religion, to comprehend, and still more to practise its lessons, the time had not yet arrived for the actual success of the doctrine; nor has it yet arrived; but the era is approaching.

It is argued in this book, that there has always been an intimate connection between the ideas which mankind enter-

tained of the character and proceedings of the Deity, and their opinion of what they themselves should be, and should do. But God is benevolent—he is Love itself; and therefore, to induce men to be like him in such respects, is the great end of all true religion. This truth, although not controverted in theory, has been obscured and opposed practically, by all corporate or associated sects and parties; and the secret cause of this has been—the world having been hitherto in comparative infancy—its animal and selfish propensities having as yet preponderated, over its intellectual and moral faculties.

It is under this view, that so much space in our discussion is occupied with religion generally, and its doctrine of benevolence particularly; but this is not a book of controversy; the author is not a theologian in the common acceptance of the term, that is, he is not exclusively attached to any sect or system. He would wish rather to be considered a philosopher, if that term had not likewise undergone a change from its original meaning. In antiquity, philosophy and religion were united, and should never have been divorced; but the priests of the dark ages, assumed an exclusive and baneful dominion over religion, so that when learning was revived, philosophers soon came to be disgusted at the uncouth and distorted form of popular piety. In some respects, this Essay attempts to reunite those old friends and natural allies—religion and philosophy; and the Author has sanguine expectations, that the fruit of such reunion, will be the accomplishment of those hopes—which poets and philosophers—which wise and good men of all ages, have entertained, of the ultimate destiny of Man.

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ON THE
MORAL CONSTITUTION AND HISTORY
OF
MAN.

CHAPTER I.

As we propose to treat on this subject with a particular reference to the progressive improvement of society, we begin by remarking, that there is a strong analogy between the constitution and history of individual man, and of Society, or mankind collectively; in this respect, that both of them commencing in a state of infancy, are destined to unfold their powers gradually, till they arrive at a state of maturity. In the early stage of this progressive development of the human faculties, the character is *necessarily* defective. Knowledge, experience, and habit, are things which all created beings must *acquire*; and it appears to be the plan of Providence with respect to man, that he shall only acquire them slowly, and frequently at the expense of temporary suffering and error. The laws of his constitution, however, have a tendency to carry him constantly forward in these *acquisitions*, although this tendency may be thwarted at times, by unfavourable accidents and circumstances. The truth of these observations will be readily perceived and admitted in the case of individuals, but their application to the history and character of society, has only begun of late years to excite attention.

Among the ancients, the progress which had been actually made was so small, and the prospect before them so vague or dark, that it was impossible for them to have formed any idea of the plan of Providence, or scarcely even to have had a distinct assurance that there existed a design at all, in the affairs of men, or any divine superintendence of them. There has been displayed, indeed, in all ages, a certain moral instinct, convincing those who cherished its dictates, that truth and righteousness were destined to triumph over error and wickedness, and, consequently, that a state of happiness should succeed to that of suffering. But the sentiments of the ancients on this subject, were wavering and indistinct; they amounted only to inferences from their belief in the existence and righteous character of God, rather than to any conceptions of the time and manner in which their hopes were to be fulfilled. The Book of Job—perhaps the oldest in the world—is at least the oldest treatise extant, on the subject of the moral government of God, and is full of ideas accordant with the above observations. The doctrine both of that Patriarch and of his friends, is clear and positive, as to the proper nature and tendency of wisdom and virtue; also as to the opposite character and destiny of folly and vice; but his own sufferings (a type of those of humanity in general) confounded their judgment, and made them draw different conclusions according to their respective prejudices.

The common solution which we of the present day, give of the apparent triumphs of evil, by referring to a future state, where all things shall be put to rights, was by no means obvious to men of old times. This is evident from the prayer of Hezekiah, and many similar passages in the Old Testament. There, we find him urging the following argument with God: “for the grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit, cannot hope for thy truth.” From such passages it appears, that among the Israelites any views of

Providence, arising out of the doctrine of a future state, were comparatively weak and wavering, and therefore, that they drew their chief solace and encouragement, respecting the ultimate destiny of man, and the righteous character and administration of Providence, from that moral instinct of which we have spoken, and from the visible tendency and course of things in favour of truth and virtue, at the *long run*. This train of thought is particularly conspicuous in the Book of Psalms. Thus, “the Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles thereof be glad; clouds and darkness are around him, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne—he preserveth the souls of his saints—he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright of heart—when the wicked spring up as grass and the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed, and cut off for ever—but the righteous shall flourish as a palm tree, he shall grow like the cedars of Lebanon—for yet a little while, and the evil doers shall be cut off, but the meek shall inherit the earth, and rejoice in the abundance of peace.”

These extracts may be either regarded as the natural expressions of moral instinct, or as authoritative declarations addressed to it, by way of encouragement; but under either view, we learn from them, that the ancients had only a general faith in the issue of Providence, without comprehending its particular progress, or means of accomplishment. And even such views of the Old Testament saints, indistinct as they are, were far in advance of the world in general. *They* had the advantage of some special instructions and prophecies on the subject; but when we look into the opinions of the Greeks and Romans, we find no doctrine concerning the moral principles of human nature and society, under the view of a progressive system. Their philosophers indeed, felt and taught “that virtue was its own reward,” but the idea of its general

diffusion and triumph, in connexion with knowledge, with freedom, and with the elements of universal happiness, and true glory, does not seem to have entered into their minds. The sentiment of philanthropy, with which all such speculations are intimately combined, was unknown to them, if we do not suppose it to have influenced some of the reveries of Plato; practically, at any rate, they had only patriots, not philanthropists. But patriotism looks merely to the good of one country, and is on that very account, generally opposed to the good of other countries. Socrates, indeed, by teaching a rational piety and a useful morality in opposition to the sophists, gave a practical impulse to the general progress of society, in moral wisdom; but he had no idea of the place which he occupied in so doing, and of the tendency and issue of the general movement. The history and experience of the world, in fact, presented such a confused appearance, even at the commencement of the Christian era, that no idea could have been formed, of any prevailing design in its moral constitution, and much less, of what was to be the issue of such design.

Christianity, by proclaiming the advent of Messiah, first cast a distinct and steady light on our subject. It was foretold by the Prophets, that under his reign, truth and righteousness should prevail, and that the whole world ultimately becoming his subjects, would enjoy the benefits of peace and of abundance. Unfortunately, however, the Jews imagined that all this was to be accomplished by political means, and by a temporal kingdom, under which they were to enjoy special privileges, as the peculiar people of God. Blinded by this prejudice, they were offended when they found that the means of erecting the kingdom of heaven, proposed by Jesus of Nazareth, were to be purely spiritual and moral; and for this reason, most of them rejected him and his doctrine. Even his disciples retained some prejudices of this sort, till the day of Pentecost; but after that, indeed, the Church acted habitually under the

opinion, that the kingdom of Christ was properly a spiritual one, and having nothing but spiritual objects in view. In this, however, the Church went somewhat to an opposite extreme. Its attention was so much occupied with those views of the character and doctrine of its Master, in which he is represented as the antitype of the sacrifices and mediators of olden time, that it lost sight, in a great measure, of the design and destiny of Christianity, as the grand moral instrument of Providence, in regenerating and governing society and thereby bringing it to a definite perfection.

One reason of this neglect was, that the first Christians had taken up an impression, that the end of the world was at hand; and consequently, their attention was engrossed about “*the forgiveness of their sins;*” and with moral conduct or considerations, only so far as might qualify them for the enjoyment or rewards of that *future state*, in which all their hopes and fears were centred. In course of time, indeed, experience, and certain prophetic explanations communicated to the Apostles, dispelled this mistake, about “the day of Christ (his coming to judgment) being at hand.” But other causes of a more general nature, were in operation at this period, and continued after the death of the Apostles, to rivet the attention of the early Christians exclusively upon those topics which affected their personal salvation in a *future state*. In that age of the world, the prevailing sentiment of mankind was unfavourable, or at least doubtful, concerning the Divine Goodness. This had been the result of their ignorance and superstition. Even the Jewish dispensation was darkened by some shadows of this kind, and was confessedly influenced by a spirit of fear and of bondage. The minds of men, therefore, were particularly *anxious* about the means of being *assured* of the divine mercy to themselves individually, and were specially occupied with those doctrines or views of Christianity, which were calculated to allay such anxieties. Besides this, as the Christians only

formed a very small proportion of society, and could have no influence over its institutions and opinions, they were the more disposed to rest contented with the salvation of their own, or other men's souls in a *future state*, without thinking much about the state or prospects of society *in this life*.

A few, indeed, occupied themselves with speculations about the Millennium, but their conceptions of it were childish and extravagant. They had no just idea of the scheme of Providence, nor of the moral constitution of man. It was not till after the age of Constantine, that Christians began to think of the influence which their religion might have on the state of society; and from that time forward, the Church did manifest a sufficient disposition to mingle with the politics and social relations of mankind. But still its views and means were confined chiefly to the power which it assumed over the interests and issues of a future state; and that power it applied as the instrument of governing men in this world, for the same purposes as had been done by the authority of Cæsar—namely, to obtain for its officers, worldly honours and riches, and for its subjects peculiar privileges. In this spirit the Church occupied itself incessantly in the invention and definition of the dogmas of orthodoxy; and in organizing the armies of the Clergy and of the Monks. By such means a certain sort of spiritual kingdom was erected, and during the darkness and confusion of the middle ages, *it* was in many respects useful in preserving the elements of society from being completely dissolved into a state of absolute anarchy. But this was making no *forward movement*. It was only reverting to the old principles of *fear* and *force*, necessary to control people in the lower stages of civilization. The form of government was altered, but the spirit was the same or worse; and therefore, if it had not been for certain redeeming influences of the Christian morality, working privately and indirectly on the character of individuals, the world during this period, would have positively retrograded.

We shall have occasion to speak of this fact, at another time, and more at large, but my view in adverting to it at present, is merely to show, that mankind were still in a condition to form no just idea of the true theory of moral philosophy, as it regards the constitution of man, and the destiny of society. The Church had no higher idea nor aim in this respect, than to subject the whole world to the dogmas and authority of the Clergy, just as the Jews expected to have subjected it to the Law of Moses, and the doctrine of the Rabbis. Its subjects were made to believe that they were living under the Millennium, and when a thousand years had expired, a most alarming and general conviction was spread throughout the whole of Christendom, "that the end of the world was then certainly at hand."

The revival of learning—the progress of liberty—the improvement of the arts and sciences—and the Reformation of the Church, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, opened at length new views of society to the attentive philosopher. It then began to appear, upon taking a retrospective view of history, that the world had hitherto been in a state of comparative infancy, and was only beginning to discover and avail itself of powers and resources which were formerly unknown. Unfortunately, however, the wars which followed between the Catholics and Protestants, and between the people of several countries and their rulers, on the ground of civil liberty—the fatal effects of these contentions, for two centuries—stopped that progress which might have been expected, from the liberal principles of the new era. The leading reformers, in the Church particularly (and it was the paramount interest for the time), contented themselves with correcting past abuses, rather than carrying forward the world to a new stage of civilization. To restore the Church to the government of Bishops, of Presbyters, or of separate and independent Congregations, as each party believed to have been the primitive practice; and to revert to the theologi-

cal doctrines which prevailed in the primitive Church—these objects bounded the views of the Reforming Theologians. They took it for granted, that every nation and government which would support such systems, would enjoy the special blessing of Providence, and receive, along with their favourite ecclesiastical polity and doctrines, all the requisite improvements of their political and social condition. Thus they were prevented from attending to that principle of *progression*, which otherwise might have been apparent enough in their day.

It was not till after the force of those religious controversies and wars had spent itself, that the learned men of Europe began to indulge in political and philosophical speculations about the principles and prospects of society. They were incited to, and guided in these investigations, by that idea of *progression*, which the theologians had overlooked, and which had received the most striking and additional evidence, by the rapid advances made in knowledge, and in all the arts of civilized life, during the eighteenth century. Nobody who now reflects on the subject, can doubt the fact of a progress having been made; but it will be our endeavour to prove, in particular instances, the striking analogy displayed by this developement of the human faculties, in the case of the species, as compared to that of individuals. Our first object was to point out the fact simply, and to account for why it had never been observed till of late. We are next to point out its details, its application, and its importance.

CHAPTER II.

THE first view which we shall take of the analogy which may be observed, between the character of man individually, and that of society, is this—that the individual in passing through the different stages of life, comes successively

under the influence of different powers, in proportion as his faculties are developed. In infancy, he is a mere animal; being affected chiefly by the appetites, instincts, and passions of animal life. These are essentially *selfish*, having for their object the preservation, the nutrition, and the health of the individual. While not under the immediate excitement of such feelings, the infant does indeed display the rudiments of his intellectual and moral faculties; and these, while yet in their bud, and being as yet unsophisticated, have a peculiar interest and charm about them. But still the animal propensities are the dominant powers. We are speaking simply of their natural developement and influence at this period, for as to the control of them, by the force of parental authority and education, we shall have an opportunity to advert to such circumstances and their effects in another part of our discussion. I repeat, therefore, that in our first stage of individual existence, the animal passions prevail; and, consequently, that man, like the lower creatures, is, in the first instance *selfish*—intent on the gratification of his natural instincts and propensities—careless about the interests and feelings of others—and governed by caprice, instead of reason, in the exercise of his will and pursuit of his inclination. All this is the natural result of his constitution and circumstances in childhood.

The next faculty under the influence of which he falls, is that of Imagination. With a great curiosity to learn the causes and uses of every thing, the infant mind is credulous in the highest degree. His imagination is particularly charmed with the wonderful. He becomes the easy dupe of every tale that is told him, so that even after his experience and his reason might dissipate certain delusions, he finds it difficult to shake off the impressions he has received.

In the third place, his Intellectual powers are developed, and assume, or try to assume the mastery. But this mastery is far from being complete, frequently not even pre-

dominant. For, besides having to contend against the remains of preceding influences and habits, man finds himself at this time of life, surrounded by circumstances which compel him to *fight* his way through the world. Every other man is his rival and competitor in one shape or another. Nor is the necessity of his condition greater than his own natural inclination, to enter into this scene of competition and strife. He has arrived at that pugnacious stage of life, when, confident in his powers and good fortune, he willingly measures them with every rival that may cross his path. He has now gained strength and knowledge; he has risen above the prejudices of childhood and the follies of youth; but has he yet acquired wisdom and happiness?

No. There yet remains another set of faculties to be developed and exercised. These are the moral powers, and *they* are the result of that balance of the whole mental faculties—of that appropriate exercise of each in its due place and time, which constitutes the perfection and maturity of human nature. The result of such attainment is moral wisdom, and *it* is the proper attribute of *age*. For as the developement of the imagination succeeds that of the animal faculties, and as reason again succeeds imagination, so our moral faculties are the latest in being developed and matured. It is true indeed, that certain moral sentiments are natural and constitutional to us, and may be traced through all the former periods in various occasional displays; yet, while they are kept under by our animal propensities, deceived by imagination, or perverted by false reasoning, they never acquire that preponderant influence over the conduct to which they are entitled. In such a world as this is, and surrounded with so many temptations—knowledge, experience, and established habits, are requisite to the full developement and power of our moral sentiments; and in the general course of nature, these things are only to be *acquired* by age. It is by elderly persons, that the vanity of those eager passions and

pursuits which engross the attention of mankind, are best perceived and felt. *They* know how unsatisfactory the ambition, the restless activity, and competitive spirit of middle life are, as well as the follies of youth, and the ignorance of childhood. I say, this is the proper and natural course of things; but in regard to particular persons, it is to be lamented that many do never practically arrive at this moral wisdom. They are contaminated during their progress through life, by some evil habit or vice, which sticks to them in old age. And even among those who have not been positively contaminated by any bad habits, there are many who have been influenced by the force of example or of circumstances, to conform in a considerable degree to certain low standards of morality and maxims of worldly wisdom, inconsistent with the dictates of true wisdom. Such is the natural progress of individual character, with which we are now to compare the progress of society, and with which we shall find, in all the above-mentioned particulars, that there has been a remarkable analogy.

There is one circumstance in the close of individual life, however, in which the comparison will not hold good, but it is worthy of a passing notice here, as completing our sketch of individual life, and holding forth a useful lesson. We see that man, whose chief glory and end consists manifestly in becoming an intellectual and moral being, superior to, and different in that respect from, all other living creatures on this earth—that this comparatively noble creature of God, does not arrive at the full developement and use of his peculiar faculties till near the close of life. All others complete their character and powers in a short period, and enjoy them in vigour during the most of their lifetime. It may be reasonably inferred, therefore, that there shall be a future state for man, and with this view we can understand how the wisdom of age, the experience of life, and the knowledge of good and of evil, to which he only arrives in his last stage, may at

once qualify us for a higher state of existence, and enhance the value of that repose, and that happiness which the wise shall there enjoy.

We come now to consider mankind collectively, or Society, in its character and history, during the different stages of its progress. In the early age of society, whether we study it in the general history of the world, or in that of particular tribes who still continue in a state of infancy, we behold the mere animal passions prevailing, as in children. Savages are wholly occupied with the means of self-preservation and the gratification of their natural appetites and instincts. The first constitutes all their business, the second all their pleasures. The germs of their intellectual faculties, and of their moral sentiments, are indeed distinctly visible, and in some persons of good dispositions, the latter in particular, will display themselves, like the amiable qualities of children, in a very engaging manner. But still, as we said of children, so of savages in general, the dominant powers are those of animal passions, with all their peculiar caprices and violence, and these characterise *their society* and manners. Their bodies may be perfect and *strong*, but their minds, destitute of knowledge, of experience, and of discipline, are *weak*, and the sport of every external accident or influence. In this condition they remain so long as they are contented with the lowest means of animal subsistence, and have no desire for the arts of civilized life. The succession of generations, in that case, makes no difference in their condition. For the same reason, if a nation, after making a certain progress in civilization, shall become contented with what it has attained—perhaps bigottedly attached to its old customs and manners—it will make no further improvement in mental character even in matters not immediately connected with such customs and manners. All history proves this fact, that what we call Society—that is, the benefits of *union* and *accumulation*, whether it be of contemporary individuals, or of successive generations—must

be *progressive*, to arrive at a state of perfection—ascending, of necessity, from a period of infancy, till it arrive to greater maturity. That period of infancy will be found, of course, destitute of all those things and qualities which we value in a state of advanced civilization. It is on this principle of natural *progression*, that our general argument rests, and the very first perception of it ought to remove that prejudice which has existed from time immemorial, *viz.* “that the golden age was in the *infancy* of the world,” whereas, in reality, it shall be in “the latter day.”

After the first stage of animal life, in the infancy of society, as in that of man, the faculty of the imagination is unfolded, ere yet his reason is able to guide him; or rather, imagination itself anticipates the prerogative of reason, and attempts to account for all the phenomena of nature by its own conceits. Whatever appears extraordinary, it imputes to some mysterious influence. It peoples the world with imaginary beings, who are constantly interfering with the affairs of mankind, and with the ordinary course or general laws of nature. Some of these beings are supposed to be of higher powers, others of lower—some good, others bad—all presiding over some special department, and so far independent of each other. And when the imagination has exhausted itself with these fanciful creations, it has recourse to the supposed influence of occult qualities, of charms, and of magic. From this common source, flow all the superstitions of the world, however varied; and in this stage of society, men believe in such superstitions with the same credulity, as children of a certain age do, in stories of ghosts, fairies, and hobgoblins. The same principle, but under a more beautiful and seductive form, gave rise to the fables of the poets, and to the sublime reveries of that philosophy, which, from one of its distinguished masters, was called the *Platonic*, among the Greeks and Romans. A similar system prevalent in Asia, was called the *Oriental* philosophy; and the world was governed, for many centuries, by the reve-

ries of these two schools of the Imagination, after it had rejected the grosser superstitions of the barbarous ages.

At length, the world arrived at that stage of the development of its intellectual faculties, which is parallel to that of young men at the universities, when they begin to exercise their intellect in the logic classes. They exult in the display of their new felt powers, and think that all men and all things should bend to them. In the same manner, the whole world for many centuries, was entirely engrossed in chopping logic—in attempting, by dint of its syllogisms and of hypotheses, to penetrate into the secrets of Nature, or to illustrate the doctrines of Revelation. Then it was that the Platonic is said to have given way to the Aristotelian philosophy in the schools. But the true account is, that society, or the public mind, was then making its *transition* from the influence of imagination to that of intellect, and for a while, the pranks of intellect were abundantly ludicrous, and as absurd as the preceding dreams of fancy. Those who are acquainted with the history of the middle ages, will readily admit the truth of this remark; but for the benefit of others, who are ignorant of that history, we may mention a few facts, to show them the intellectual character of the ages in question.

In those days, the complete circle of the sciences was divided into two departments—that of the *trivium*, or lower circle, consisting of three, *viz.* grammar, rhetoric, logic—and that of the *quadrivium*, or higher circle, consisting of four, namely, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Comparatively few scholars ever attempted or attained any thing beyond the first department; and you will observe that the sciences (as they were called) in it, are purely versant about *the use of words*; and were of no service but to teach men how to dispute and gabble about a set of ridiculous and silly questions, which were then agitated in the schools. These questions, even if they had been solved, (but the disputants could never agree about them,) led to no useful knowledge, being framed

merely to give room for the exercise of intellectual ingenuity and sophistry. For instance, "if a man took a pig to the market in a halter, was the pig led by the halter or by the man?" Such were the intellectual exercises of those who pretended to *think* and to *reason* in those days. In a few cases, to be sure, they attempted more worthy themes; but their mode of investigation was the same, and therefore they made no progress.

Still, however, as it is expressed in vulgar phrase, "we creep before we walk." So, these exercises of intellect strengthened its powers, as the play of children does the powers of the body, and, at length, mankind entered upon a further stage of their progress. Men began to see the absurdity of trying to unlock the secrets of nature, and the mysteries of religion, by the crude dreams of imagination, and by a miserable jangle of words. They were convinced, at length, that they must attend with reverence to what was to be discovered of nature, by its own operations, and of what was contained in revealed religion, by the express evidence and words of Revelation. In other words, that all true natural philosophy must rest on *experiment*, and all true moral philosophy on *experience*—including the testimony of others as well as our own observation. The great leader in this new development of the human faculties, was Bacon. He pointed out the road of a more clear and perfect doctrine; but he was in advance of his age in speculation, and much less could it reduce his doctrine to practice. In particular, the world was only ripe as yet for the adoption of his enlightened views, as they regarded the subjects of natural philosophy, rather than of moral philosophy or religion; and hence the progress, since his day, has been more in the department of physics, or nature, than of morals.

And this is the stage at which we of the present generation have arrived. We are in a state of *transition* from the age of matured intellect, to that of mature wisdom or moral sentiment, with more of the former element as yet,

than of the latter, and more occupied with the laws of nature, than with those of humanity, but ready to pass to the last stage, which is analogous to that of experienced age in the individual. In this last stage, however, the wisdom of society will rise superior to that of individuals. It will not be tarnished by any of the physical infirmities of old age, incident to individual life. It will not be deteriorated by the *personal* bad habits of former years. All the evils of past generations may, and will die with them—all the good may, and will survive; because their posterity shall have acquired the wisdom to reject the one and cherish the other—to profit by the experience, the knowledge, and the accumulations of their fathers. Now, it is agreed by all the wise men who have appeared in the world, and who have anticipated this issue, (and in this they concur with all the old men who have formed a just estimate of individual life), that the true happiness and perfection of human nature consists in the exercise of the benevolent affections—the practice of beneficent actions—in the intellectual gratification of knowledge, and in the repose of peace and competence. Such, therefore, will be the state and character of society in its stage of complete maturity; and we shall show, in the progress of our argument, that this conclusion is in perfect accordance with other collateral evidences, and with the operation of means suited and destined by divine Providence to accomplish that specific end.



CHAPTER III.

WE have seen, that the human mind falls under the influence of different natural powers or faculties, in its progress from infancy to maturity. I am now to show, that in consequence of this, and in correspondence with it, men have been, and require to be, governed by different systems or codes of morality. It has been a favourite

maxim among moral philosophers, that there is, nor can be, nothing *new* in morality; because its principles rest on the constitution of human nature, and on those relations of man to man, which must ever be the same in all ages and countries. This is true in one sense; yet as the age and circumstances in which men live, happen to be different, so will certain principles and precepts of morality be recognised and acted upon, in different eras, in preference to others—frequently to the exclusion of those others; and that even in such a degree, as to keep men wholly ignorant of their obligation. In such a sense, there are practically different systems or codes of morality.

In the infancy of man—while yet he is ignorant of what is good or evil for him—while he depends on his parents for subsistence and guidance, he is under the government of *authority* as a principle, and the rule of his duty is unreserved *obedience*. It is similar in the infancy of society. The origin of all the early governments, was the real or supposed authority of God, and of the fathers and patriarchs of mankind. For, though we know little in detail of the history of the antediluvian world, yet it is obvious, that while the Deity held direct intercourse with man, his will must have been the only law; and while Adam lived, he must have been the king of the world, by virtue of his paternity, and his reign lasted for more than one-half of the antediluvian era. And while the connection of a patriarch with his offspring is preserved, and the feeling of family kindness kept up, this is a very excellent state of society in regard to moral sentiment; so that, from the traditions concerning it, there is no doubt the ancient notions of the golden age took their rise. But, like the period of individual childhood with all its charms, this social childhood or domestic state of society was *necessarily evanescent*.

As men “multiplied on the face of the earth” (Gen. vi.) they lost sight of their personal consanguinity, and of the tie which bound them in obedience to their common

father and chief. Different interests and authorities arose, and contentions between them gave occasion to the wars and violence which preceded the flood. At a second crisis of the like nature, the confusion of languages, and dispersion of the descendants of Noah to more remote parts of the earth, preserved the world from falling into the same anarchy on the death of Noah, as it had done after that of Adam. Men had time, in consequence of such dispersion, to range themselves under different chiefs, while they were yet at some distance from each other, and to grow up into independent tribes and nations. The principle of government among all these, however, was the same at first, and grounded upon the original prototype, assuming that the head of the State was the father of the people, and entitled to the unreserved obedience of his subjects or family. On both sides, this might have become a mere fiction: the king may no longer have had the character of a father, nor the people of mere infants and dependants; but the love and exercise of power on the one hand, and the effect of habit on the other, kept up the old idea. At length, however, these independent tribes and nations came into contact with each other, and wars upon a large scale was the consequence. Each party made *slaves* of the conquered; and hence, *despotism* on the one hand, and *degradation* on the other, were the ultimate and natural results of this system of *authority*.

The practice of slavery, wherever it prevailed throughout the world (and it was almost universal in antiquity), and wherever it prevails to this day, produced dispositions of a peculiar kind, and relations between man and man, which regulated the moral feeling and duties of those living under it. Systems of superstition have a similar effect, making a despot of God, and slaves of his worshippers. Military subordination is based on the same principles of absolute *authority* on the part of the superior, and *obedience* on the inferior; and all these principles, in various forms, ruled the world for ages, and in many

places and respects, rule it still. Nor are we to infer, that such principles are altogether evil on account of the gross abuse which has been made of them. They were *good* in the *infancy* of individual and of social man; and even in their advanced and corrupt forms, they are better than that absolute anarchy, which would always prevail, where men are not yet trained to the influence of better principles. Hence, despotic governments, defective religions, and domestic slavery, are regarded in the Scriptures as having been “ordinances of God,” not on account of their despotism, their defects, and their slavery, but altogether, taking the good with the evil, as being, under existing circumstances, suited to, and necessary for, the government of man in certain stages of civilization. But as man is destined to advance in civilization, such ordinances are destined to pass away.

In our former chapter we treated of the *internal* principles which progressively affected human character; we are now speaking of *external* influences, and the next in point of progress is *Law*. Law begins where authority ends. It is the rule of conduct between *equals*; and with respect to society, it is the charter of *liberty*. Social and civil liberty does not consist in the *right* of every man to do as he pleases, but in his *right* of having equal justice administered between himself and all his neighbours. The system of law and of liberty is equivalent to the reign of Justice. The precepts of justice, therefore, constitute the morality of this stage of civilization or society, and are easily distinguished from precepts of authority. The precepts of justice are obvious to the common sense of mankind, or rather constitute the expression of its approbation—the precepts of authority may often be, or seem to be, arbitrary.

In these respects they constitute two distinct codes. With regard to particular nations and ages, indeed, they have generally and hitherto been under the mixed influences of both systems in various degrees, that is, of arbi-

trary authority and of law or justice. Even when these are thus blended, however, the spirit of each is distinct; for while the caprice of authority demands various and even opposite demonstrations of obedience, the rules of justice, at least in their elementary forms, are the same in all ages and countries. “Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt honour thy father and mother”—the justice and obligation of these precepts, are acknowledged by every nation as essential to the welfare, ay, and to the very existence of society. Wherever, therefore, any individual is found so destitute of sense or virtue, as to break through these rules, the public take up arms against him, and enforce obedience by the forms and the force of law.

In this stage of its operation, justice proceeds by the principle of *fear*, and by the ultimate means of military *force*; much in the same way as the system of authority does, when it is dissevered from parental affection. But when the precepts of justice are once established in the reason and the habits of men, they act voluntarily in obedience to such precepts, and then, they may be said to be actuated by the motive of *honour*. In this improved state of society, the maxim regarded as the rule of conduct among men, is, “*to do injustice to no man—neither to suffer injustice from any man;*” for it is to be remarked, that justice sanctions the latter clause of the maxim as well as the former, and permits every one to vindicate his own *rights* to the utmost (through prescribed forms), at the same time that it enjoins him to respect the *rights* of others.

To many people, the general prevalence of this maxim in society, would appear to constitute its perfection; and this is the grand object of all political reformers. And doubtless it would be attended with great advantages, in controlling the evil propensities and passions of men within certain bounds; yet, as a definitive principle, it is in-

herently and necessarily defective, for governing such a race of beings as men are, and placed in such a world as this is. The varied and complicated state of property, interests, and relations, which arise among men in an advanced stage of civilized society, is such, that it becomes a matter of the greatest difficulty, or rather it is impossible, to frame laws which shall clearly and distinctly regulate all the actions of people in their intercourse with each other.

At first view, nothing seems more simple and easy than to form good laws and regulations for the administration of justice; and a few of its leading principles and forms, are accordingly adopted by all nations. But in the application of these principles and rules to the detail of human affairs, such an immense variety of circumstances occur, that men cannot agree as to how they bear upon individual cases; and hence the fruitful source of lawsuits. Of this remark, there is a memorable illustration in the history of the Code Napoleon. It was framed in reference to an advanced stage of society; and all the abuses which had crept into the old systems of jurisprudence, with all usages which time had rendered, or should have rendered, obsolete—were removed as well as could be. Yet all-perfect as this new code of law seemed to be, in contemplation, it has been discovered that hundreds of cases are constantly occurring, in which men could not agree concerning its application to their individual affairs or transactions, and consequently an appeal to its authorised interpreters; in other words, lawsuits are as numerous as ever.

The matter is still worse in those affairs of which the public law takes no cognizance, and which are left to the sense and feeling of individuals. The diversity of their interests, their passions, and positions, gives them such different views of specific actions and affairs, that almost every one thinks his own conduct right in all matters, while he perceives innumerable faults in the conduct of

others. From this disposition, joined sometimes to a real difficulty in particular questions—and while a man views every thing only in relation to *himself*, and to his *rights*—there arises a prejudice which makes him conclude, that his own personal judgment and feelings, even on the first impressions, are the only standards of truth and justice. Hence private quarrels, alienations of mind, party spirit; and finally, the war of angry words, perhaps of personal violence—by assault, or by duel.

Now, all these, and many other mischiefs, arising from public lawsuits and private quarrels, originate in the maxim before quoted, “that we are bound to do *no more* than justice *to* others, and to be content with *nothing less* than strict justice *from* them.” In other words, such evils show the defective nature of the principle of justice, to govern such a being as man; or rather, we should say, to perfect his moral habits and education, and to make him what his constitution is capable of, and what his circumstances require him to be. His moral instincts show him to be capable of nobler sentiments than those of mere justice, and his past condition and history prove, that something more efficient is required, to perfect the peace and the happiness of society.

This requisite, is the principle of Benevolence, as the governing spirit of society in place of justice. But before we enter into the consideration of what this would involve, and how it would operate, let us look back to the chain of our argument, to observe the coincidence and connection of those successive principles of public morality above mentioned, with that progressive development of the mental faculties, which we noticed in our previous chapter.

While man is chiefly influenced by animal passions and instinct, and in a state of ignorance, he requires to be governed by Authority. The individuals invested with this authority, may be no wiser nor better than the people themselves; but whatever be the personal character of

rulers, they find themselves placed in a position which makes it necessary for them to maintain the authority of existing customs, or, it may be, the decisions of their own wills, with some uniformity; and whereby a certain order is preserved in society, and the rights of private property between man and man are protected. It is found better that all should submit to the will of one person, or to some definite custom, rather than every man should be allowed to act, as his own interests and passions might impel him. There is an intuitive perception of this necessity, causing men in the early ages of society, to submit to it without murmuring. And even in its more advanced stages, when accident has led to a temporary dissolution of society, this remedy is always adopted by general consent; that is, a military despotism succeeds to anarchy.

In the second place, and under the reign of Imagination—men have an *appearance* of liberty; but in reality it is only the liberty of choosing or forging the chains by which they prefer being bound. They surrender their *minds* to a species of slavery as despotic as that which may affect their bodies or property. We speak of the superstitions which spring from the influence of imagination, and which prolong the reign of Authority in a different form.

In the third place, the reign of Justice, of Law, and of true Liberty, is coincident with the development of the Intellectual powers.

And lastly, the reign of Benevolence, in like manner, shall only commence with that development and maturity of the Moral sentiments, which we have seen belongs to a more advanced stage of our individual and social *progress*. The consideration of these facts as connected with each other, and as displayed in the past history of the world, illustrates our general views, and leads us forward to the doctrine of Benevolence.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH a view to explain the distinction between Justice and Benevolence, as governing principles of human action, I will avail myself of some remarks made on the subject by a philosopher. His view in making them, was indeed different from mine; but it tends to fortify an argument, when it is seen to have struck the attention of persons engaged in different speculations. "Let us suppose," he says, "that Nature has bestowed on the human race, such abundance of all external conveniences, that in the certainty of the event, and without any care or industry on our part, every individual finds himself provided with whatever his most voracious appetite can want, or most luxurious imagination wish or desire. His natural beauty, we shall suppose, surpasses all acquired ornaments; the perpetual clemency of the weather renders useless all clothes or covering; the simple herbage affords him the most delicious fare; the clear fountain the richest beverage. No laborious occupation required; no tillage; no navigation. Music, poetry, and contemplation, form his sole business; mirth, conversation, and friendship, his only amusement. It is obvious, that in such a happy state, the whole laws and duties comprehended under the head of *Justice*, would become totally useless."

Again, he supposes, "That though the necessities of the human race continued the same as at present, yet if the mind of all was so enlarged and replete with friendship and generosity, that every man had the utmost tenderness for another, and felt no more concern for his own interest than for that of his fellows; it is evident that the *use* of Justice, in that case, would be superseded by such an extensive Benevolence. Nor would the divisions and barriers of property, or obligations, ever be thought of. Why should I bind another by a deed, or promise, to do

me any good office, when I know that he is, before hand, prompted by the strongest inclination? Why raise landmarks between my neighbour's field and mine, when my heart has made no division betwixt our interests—when I share all his joys and sorrows, with equal force and vivacity, as if originally my own? Every man, upon this supposition, being a second self to another, would trust all his interests to the discretion of his neighbour, without jealousy, without partition, without distinction. And the whole race of mankind would form one family, where all remained common, and was used freely, without regard to property; but cautiously, at the same time, and with as entire regard to the necessities of others, as if our own interests were most intimately concerned."

Mr. Hume, who drew this picture, concluded, however, that it was entirely chimerical, in respect to the actual character and circumstances of the human race. He only uses it to illustrate his idea concerning the different principles on which a moral system or code may rest. There may be, according to him, a code resting on the basis of Justice, and another on the basis of Benevolence. We have seen that there is a third resting on the basis of Authority; and while I agree with Hume, in reference to *past* ages, and also to the *present* age of the world, that it would be chimerical to look for the operation of a system regulated entirely by the principle of Benevolence; yet I contend, that as mankind have passed, in some instances, from the influence of Authority to that of Justice, and are capable of doing so universally, so likewise they are capable and destined to proceed from the government of Justice to that of Benevolence.

I do not mean, that the laws of justice, and the power by which they are enforced, can be ever and wholly dispensed with; because there will be continually arising in the bosom of society young persons, who, from the effects of their ignorance, their inexperience, or unusually powerful passions and propensities, may be incapable for

a time of being influenced by the nobler principle of benevolence, or who may unfortunately acquire contrary habits. The penalties of law and justice must still be kept in reserve to control such people; but the number of such unhappy persons may become comparatively small; while the force and tone of public opinion and manners, will be sufficient to keep the wavering on the side of the benevolent system. In short, from having been vastly in the minority, and even weak, inconstant, and inconsistent among its professed votaries, the principle of Benevolence shall become the dominant spirit of society.

I am well aware what a host of objections and difficulties are ready to be urged against this doctrine, in regard to its *practicability* in such a world as this is. To these we shall pay due attention, in due time; but for the present, and considering myself as addressing Christians, I have an authority to present to them in support of my view, greater than that of the philosopher already quoted, or any other philosopher whom the world ever saw. Our system of Benevolence is precisely equivalent to the moral doctrine of Jesus Christ; and therefore, the question of its practicability is just the same with the *probability* of its reign, or of the practical triumph of Christianity in the world. I say, that Christianity, as a practical system for the moral government of man, is distinctly grounded on the principle of benevolence, as we have stated it; nay, more, it is distinctly contrasted in that respect, with the laws of common justice.

The intention and the spirit of the Christian morality, may be expressed in this maxim, namely—"that we ought *to do more* than mere justice to our neighbours, and be content with *less* than strict justice *from* them." I have framed this maxim or definition, purposely in the form of a contrast to the commonly received maxim of the system of Justice which we formerly noticed, and by attending to the marked difference between them, we shall be able to conceive a proper idea of the Benevolent or Christian system.

We have said, that it induces and indeed commands its subjects, not only to do justice, but to do *more* when occasion calls for it; and the condition and circumstances of human life, frequently require more to be done to, and for others, than we are bound to do by *law*. By the very constitution of nature and society, some people are fortunate and some unfortunate. One may have health and strength, another may be diseased and weak. One may meet with accidents which diminish or destroy his property, another with accidents which increase it. Some have a greater capacity than others for employments and affairs, which gain them riches or honour. Many are affected for better or for worse by the previous circumstances and conduct of their parents, and others over whom they had no control; while the consequences even of personal imprudence are often more grievous and lasting than any well-disposed mind could wish to behold. From these and similar causes, a great proportion of mankind are rendered miserable; and surely it is becoming and requisite on the more fortunate members of society, to be liberal in their conduct towards the unfortunate, and to give them *more* than their legal dues.

We are capable of feeling and acting liberally. We are made to approve such conduct. All men love and esteem those who act in such a manner. And in so doing, benevolent persons themselves feel an inward complacency which assures them that they have been acting agreeably to the laws of nature—in other words, to the will of God. Now, when we consider those sentiments of universal approbation in favour of benevolence, in connection with the circumstances which Providence hath created to give room for the exercise of it, and without which circumstances the sentiment of benevolence could neither be felt nor known; it is plain, that man was formed to be governed by the principle of Benevolence, rather than of Justice. And so long as he has not arrived at this stage of moral improvement and civilization, he is in a state of

infancy and comparative barbarism. He has neither attained to the full development of his faculties, nor to those habits and manners, without which the best governed and most polished society under the system of Justice, must still be infected, to a great extent, with moral evil and misery.

Christianity proceeds upon this view of human nature, and its morality is, in fact, and by design, a code or system of precepts, for the government of mankind by the principle of benevolence; in other words, for teaching them to be ready always “to *do more* than mere justice to others, and to be content with *less* than strict justice to themselves.”

By one class of precepts, we are commanded “to give to him that asketh or that is in want”—by another, “to yield to demands against us, even where we might dispute their legality”—by a third, “to submit to injustice”—by a fourth, “to forgive injuries”—by a fifth, “to return good for evil,” and so forth. All these precepts are applications of the general maxim, *to do more than justice, and to be content with less*. In other words, they substitute the sentiments of benevolence, or, in the language of Scripture, of charity or love, for the rules of justice, as the *governing principle of action*.

We may remark here, that as the maxim of justice has its active and passive form, not only pointing out what is right to be *done by us*, but what is our *right* to have done *to us*; so the maxim of benevolence has its active and passive form also. All have not the means of actively doing benefits, at least in a large way; but those who have not this advantage, may yet have abundant opportunities of manifesting their patience, meekness, contentment, gratitude, and forgiving disposition; in doing which, they are passively fulfilling the maxim of benevolence. But whether actively or passively, persons conducting themselves under the opposite systems, in any given case, are behaving in diametrical contrast to each other. The votaries of jus-

tice are in the constant attitude of competition, of dispute, and of warfare; the votaries of benevolence are in a state of repose, of love, and of peace. Those precepts of Christianity, therefore, which do not directly point to exertions of active beneficence, are still influenced by the passive sentiments of a real benevolence, and they constitute altogether one peculiar system of morality.

The precepts of Jesus Christ embrace a great latitude, but they are constantly marked by the above mentioned distinction. He was at great pains to render this striking and obvious. He refers to the rules of Justice, as “to what had been said of *old* time”—to the precepts of Benevolence, as “to what he *now* says to the world.” The rules of Justice had been taught by the Scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses’ seat, and so far they did well; but I tell you he says, “that unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God;” [the new order of things to be introduced by Messiah.] The rules of Justice, were acknowledged even by the heathen and publicans; but what does it signify, he adds, to balance and value benefits by equivalents, by the measures and weights of justice—“to do good to them who do good to you;” I tell you to do good without view to present reward, “even to the evil and unthankful—to bear with injuries, and, in so doing, to be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect;” in benevolence—for God is equally above the consideration of benefit, and the sense of injury.

I know that those professed Christians who have not been in the habit of considering the precepts of Christianity in this light (and I fear such are numerous), may start many difficulties and objections, about what they will call this *literal* mode of interpreting them. As has been already hinted, we shall have a proper opportunity of discussing such objections and difficulties, in the course of our investigation; but my present argument with them,

is this:—that the doctrine of Benevolence, which I have endeavoured to show, will succeed to, and supersede that of Justice, is exactly the doctrine of that Master whom they profess to revere, and therefore, I claim for it the authority of his name. In his name, I claim a candid consideration of the subject, without being prejudged as a visionary; for although, in point of fact, his moral doctrine (under the view we take of it) has not hitherto prevailed even among his followers, yet that is nothing but what he himself and the prophets foretold would be the case; but notwithstanding, he, and they likewise, assert, that his doctrine shall ultimately prevail “in the fulness of time,” and accomplish the effects for which it was designed and calculated.

Hitherto we have spoken of the *natural* development of the human faculties, and of those principles which were thereby elicited, and by which mankind were consequently governed. We have at length adverted to an *external* influence, *viz.* the doctrine and agency of *revealed* religion. Before proceeding farther, therefore, with the progressive history of our subject, let us see how far the *natural* course of things has been modified by the external influence of *supernatural* causes. This will open a new view of our subject to us, in which we shall see Divine Providence acting the same part toward the human race, which a parent does toward his children—that is, instructing, guiding, and educating them, in their nonage, by dispensations suited to their capacity, and thereby drawing forth their latent faculties at an earlier period than they could otherwise have been unfolded; or rather, awakening and exciting what might otherwise have remained dormant. This system of education, from the very nature of it, was necessarily confined primarily to certain chosen persons and places, but was designed for the ultimate benefit of all; being destined to spread from small points, till it should extend its influence over the whole earth, like “the light of the morning, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.”

CHAPTER V.

HITHERTO our discussion, although embracing matter respecting which there may possibly be some difference of views, has been clear of common controversies. It is impossible, however, even to dip into *theology*, without being involved in some of its disputes. I regret this, because it is not my object to advocate the peculiar opinions of any party; and yet party spirit is so strong, that one can hardly speak one's mind freely, upon any subject connected with theology, without being set down as a partizan of some of its distinguished theories; and of having all their associated ideas and consequences imputed to you. I wish, as far as possible, to pursue our argument independently of the views of contending theologians; but it is necessary to advert to such of their opinions as have a bearing on our subject. And here it happens, that the common theological opinions concerning human nature, are essential to certain dogmas, upon which an immense and complicated fabric of doctrine has been built. We must therefore descend to the root of the matter in this case; but we shall endeavour to do so, in the spirit of a candid philosophy, rather than in that of a captious theology.

It has been commonly assumed, that man was created originally perfect in his intellectual and moral faculties; not only in respect of their capacity, but of their actual power or exercise. The character of Adam is drawn in the following style: "His judgment was perfectly clear and unclouded by error—his will was in perfect subjection to his understanding—his passions and appetites completely under the control of his will. In short, he was fortified against the power of sin and error, by having all his faculties in exact harmony with each other, and with the external objects and beings to whom he was related. Moreover, this state of moral perfection was

the result of a positive and inherent righteousness which none of his posterity ever possessed, with the exception of Jesus Christ." But when we demand, upon what authority such pictures are drawn, we get no satisfactory answer. The truth is, that they are drawn from certain preconceived ideas of moral perfection; and assuming that Adam was perfect, it is inferred that his character corresponded to such ideas. But the question still recurs, upon what authority is it assumed that the intellectual and moral character of Adam was mature and perfect?

It is probable that this opinion first originated with another, namely,—that the Creator neither was nor could be the author of any thing that is evil, therefore that man must have come from his hands perfectly good, and the evil have sprung up afterwards, and by some other agency. This was the doctrine of the Persian Magi, the first speculators upon that abstruse and difficult question, "the origin of evil," and who believed in two independent principles or gods, the one good, the other evil. But so far, this was a mere theory started in an early age of the world, when men were as yet extremely ignorant of the plan of Providence regarding their moral constitution and destiny. It was a theory got up under the reign of Imagination, and we who live in the more advanced and Intellectual age of the world, so far from considering ourselves as bound by such *authorities*, ought to suspect them. It is not to be supposed that the ancients could comprehend the origin of evil, while they were yet ignorant of its uses, of its cure, and of the final issue of all things; and hence the impenetrable and acknowledged mystery in which that subject has been hitherto involved. It shall only be, when we come to comprehend the whole plan and purpose of Providence, in the moral constitution and government of the world, as developed by its final issue, that we can form any idea of the cause and design of evil in its actual progress. So far as our investigation shall throw light on this plan, it will tend to solve the

question about evil; but we must get forward to our object by the way of *induction*, and not of fanciful *hypotheses*.

But it will be said, the Scriptures give such a view of Adam's character. Well, let us hear what they say; let us however remember, that we ought to examine them rationally and impartially; that is to say, we are not to grasp at solitary and incidental expressions, which may perhaps admit of an interpretation in accordance to the theory, but which of themselves could not lay the foundation of it. We are seeking for its *foundation*, and surely if it be a doctrine of revelation, and so important a one as it is commonly represented, we shall find it distinctly stated. Now the first remark that strikes me, is, how little is said about the character of Adam at all in the Scriptures? and that little by no means clearly to the point in question.

In the book of Genesis, where we might expect to find the most direct notice of the subject, there is nothing formally stated about the moral constitution or character of Adam, excepting that he was made "*in the image of God.*" But that is a very vague expression, for it will not be denied that every intelligent and moral being is made in the image of God, as contrasted with the brutes. Besides, the expression seems to have some reference to the *dominion* which man was to exercise over all the other creatures of this world, in which respect he is *still* the representative and image of God on earth. At any rate, the expression does not point out the *degree* in which Adam stood in the scale of intelligence and moral qualities, nor how far these were in a state of infancy or maturity; and that is the proper subject of our inquiry.

We are next informed, that having lived (apparently only a short time) in very friendly intercourse with their Maker, our first parents disobeyed his injunctions, were thrust out of paradise, and were condemned to labour, to occasional sorrow, and at length to death itself, in the

manner that all mankind have ever since been subjected to such evils. This is emphatically called by theologians, *the fall*, and it is supposed to have been attended with an entire revolution of character in human nature, or rather with the subversion and loss of every good moral principle and disposition. This view of the matter, however, is only an *inference* from, and by no means any assertion in the text of this part of the Scriptures. We shall afterwards have occasion to examine the correctness of this inference; but for the present, we inquire into the historical and direct notices which are given us of the transaction in question.

It is remarkable, that after the short notice in Genesis, of the history of our first parents in paradise, there is no further allusion to it in all the writings of Moses and the Prophets; and yet the causes and the prevalence of moral evil are copiously adverted to in the Old Testament. The chief source of it in such cases, is constantly attributed to *idolatry*, which was an *invention* of man subsequent to the flood; or rather, in its worst forms and effects, it was subsequent to the patriarchal age. It is equally remarkable, that no notice is taken of the history of our first parents by our Saviour, nor does he make any reference to their *fall*, as being the *origin* of evil, although it was one special object of his teaching, to testify that the world was *evil*, and to urge the necessity of its regeneration.

Surely there is in this respect a very striking contrast between our modern systems of theology and the doctrine of Moses, of the Prophets, and of our Lord. In *our* Confessions of Faith and articles of theology, the doctrine of the fall and its supposed consequences, occupy a large and prominent place. With those inspired teachers, it occupies only the room of a short, singular, and obscure paragraph. Let me request my reader, if he be prejudiced in favour of our modern confessions and creeds, to pause and ponder a little on this remarkable discre-

pancy, and if he have any candour at all, it ought to make him proceed in our future investigation with less prejudice.

When we come to the Epistles of Paul, we shall indeed find something more about our subject, than can be found either in the writings of the Prophets, or the doctrine of Jesus Christ; but in order to understand his observations and statements on the point, we must take into view the prevailing opinions of the Jews in his day, and the origin of such opinions. The truth is, that the Jews after their captivity by the Persians, and during their subsequent intercourse with the Greeks, began to acquire the habit of speculating about a great many things concerning which their forefathers were either totally ignorant, or at least had very obscure ideas. This turn of speculation was confirmed afterwards, by the circumstance of their learned men imbibing the spirit and taste of the Greek philosophy in its more advanced attempts to apply the force of logic to the investigation of nature and of truth. By applying these new principles and methods of philosophy to their own Scriptures, they extracted matter and drew inferences from them, that were never contemplated by the ancient Israelites.

Nor do we mean to say that they were always wrong in their conclusions. The doctrine of the resurrection, for instance, or the immortality of the soul, was undoubtedly better understood by the Jews at the commencement of the Christian era, than it had been by their fathers before the captivity; and yet they had received no additional revelation on the subject. In that instance, the light of improved reason and philosophy had strengthened and illustrated the comparatively obscure intimations of revelation, under the Old Testament. We may be further satisfied, that this was the true state of the matter, when we reflect that the Sadducees denied the doctrine of the resurrection or of the future state, in any form, although they still remained the disciples of Moses, and believed in the Prophets generally. It follows, that the doctrine of the

resurrection, however true, did not rest *directly* and *indubitably* on the authority of revelation, till it was sanctioned and illustrated by the unequivocal declarations of Christ.

Now, proceeding upon the same view, it appears that the later Jews had speculated somewhat on the origin of evil, as connected with the history of our first parents, recorded in the Scriptures; and that they had taken up opinions, we do not say the same, but perhaps similar to those of our modern theologians on the subject. These opinions might be right or wrong, but they rested as yet merely upon the grounds of human reason, or of *inference* from the Scriptures, of which other persons, and we, for example, are as competent to judge as the Jews were, till the opinions shall be confirmed or rejected by some higher authority. But in this case, Christ *did not confirm* nor sanction their opinion about the fall, as he did that about the doctrine of the resurrection. One of two things therefore must follow, *viz.* either that he did not admit the correctness of their opinion, or, that regarding it as a matter of little practical importance, and not connected with the object and duty of his mission, he left it where he found it, a subject to exercise the ingenuity and reasoning faculties of future generations, as it had done those of preceding ones. How, otherwise, is it possible to account for the fact, that he avoided all allusion to the history or doctrine of the *fall*, in testifying against the evil which prevailed in the world? Could a modern theologian of the school we speak of, do this, even if he should try it? No, he could not. If he had to develop *his views* of human nature, *he could not do it* without bringing in *the fall*. But our Lord developed the true theory of human nature without reference to *the fall*.

It may be said, however, although Christ did not in this manner sanction the common doctrine concerning the fall, yet the apostle Paul did so, and he being an inspired writer, his sanction amounts to the same thing, and thus places

the doctrine upon the same level with that of the resurrection. We shall inquire into the correctness of this assertion immediately; but still we ought to carry along with us the previous observation concerning the silence of Moses, of the Prophets, and of our Lord, in so far, that we should require a pretty clear and positive declaration on the part of Paul, before we can be reasonably satisfied, that he brings forward (what has been called) a fundamental doctrine of religion, which had been overlooked by his Master. It has indeed been alleged, that Christ "having many things to teach his disciples which they could not receive while he was with them," he instructed the Apostles afterwards by inspiration respecting such things, and this might be one of them. But without stopping to inquire into the ground of this opinion, we may safely say, that the doctrine of the fall was none of those things, because the Jews had no prejudices nor objections against that doctrine. I repeat therefore, that we should require *very distinct declarations* on the part of Paul, to establish the popular opinion.

Now it happens, that any thing which Paul has said on the subject, only arises *incidentally* in the course of an *argument*; and even if we supposed that the point in question had been the object of his argument, still every argument being an appeal to facts and principles already admitted by the opponent, no part of the reasoning or conclusion taken separately from its connexion, can be esteemed a *distinct and authoritative declaration* of any truth, considered as being unknown before. For example, our Lord upon one occasion condescended to *argue* in favour of the resurrection against the Sadducees, in order to show them their ignorance even of the Scriptures they professed to venerate; but if he had not, upon other occasions, promulgated the doctrine in more clear and authoritative terms, our belief of it would still have rested on the same ground as that of the Pharisees, and been proportionally weak and assailable. In respect, therefore,

that Paul's Epistles are *argumentative*, and many allusions contained in them only *incidental*, they are not quite so good an authority upon such a fundamental doctrine, as we could wish. But what, after all, does he say? The substance of it is, "that sin entered into the world by Adam, and death by sin." This is a matter of *fact*, and of that there is no question; but if it is *inferred*, "that Adam was created *naturally* immortal, and became mortal only in consequence of eating the forbidden fruit," I demur.

The idea of Adam's natural immortality is inconsistent with the circumstance, that he was expected to multiply his species, and replenish the earth in the ordinary course of nature; for as his children must have *grown* from infancy to maturity, so by the same general law of nature which affects all living creatures in this world, they would likewise have *decayed* and died in the natural course of things. And yet there was nothing in this to have prevented mankind in case of continued innocence, to have been translated into heaven as Enoch and Elijah were, or to have been *changed* as those persons shall be, who may be alive at the end of the world. The immortality of Adam, in that view, was not the result of any difference in his physical or natural constitution between him and us. It was the result of a special and miraculous provision to be made for preserving him in health, and saving him from the ordinary pains of dissolution. This arrangement was some way or other connected with "the tree of life," either as the means or as a pledge of its accomplishment; and hence, when our first parents were driven from paradise for their disobedience, the reason assigned for such a local banishment was, "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and *live for ever*."

The difference of Adam's case and ours, therefore, in the article of mortality, was an *external* circumstance, and not the result of any essential or internal change of con-

stitution, either natural or moral. What Paul has said about the entrance of sin, and its consequences as to death, only verifies the fact, about which we have no dispute; but it does not establish the common inference or opinion connected with that fact. Do we therefore allege that the fall was attended with no moral injury to man? Not so; but we may proceed to investigate its nature and effects, without being fettered with the prejudice, that Paul has settled the point, any more than Moses, or the Prophets, or our Lord.

CHAPTER VI.

LET us now inquire into the real character and constitution of our first parents, unprejudiced by the popular opinion, and by the unfounded presumption that such opinion rests upon any direct testimony of the Scriptures. So far as the common doctrine may rest upon any fair deduction from the scanty facts we are made acquainted with by the Scriptures, or from facts which come otherwise to our knowledge, or from the doctrines clearly taught by revelation—all this is another matter. But we are undoubtedly at liberty to inquire, at the same time, if any other theory be not equally consistent, or more so, with the facts and principles which may be admitted. And this is the mode in which I propose to prosecute our investigation.

I will suppose, therefore, that the actual difference in the moral condition of Adam, as compared with that of his posterity, was entirely the result of *external circumstances*, just as his immortality was; the physical and moral constitution of each having been essentially the same. In other words, I will show that many persons among his posterity would have acted like him, under the same circumstances; that is, they would have been equally innocent in such a place as paradise, but equally liable to *fall*, under the force of temptations with which they were

inexperienced. In making this comparison of character and conduct between our first parents and their children, I will take for an example a couple of young married folks, (as Adam and Eve were,) and I have only one demand to make in their favour, which cannot be reasonably refused. It is this, that I may be allowed to select them out of those individuals who have the best natural parts and dispositions among mankind.

I have said this is reasonable, because there are many instances of positive bad habits, and of failure in good conduct, which arise from the weak understanding and perverse dispositions of individuals, which it would be unfair to ascribe to the whole race. Indeed, there are other persons just as remarkable for their natural good sense and feeling, as those are for the want of them. This diversity is the result of that general law of nature, by which an almost infinite variety takes place, among the individuals of every species of living creatures. Many of them degenerate from the more perfect specimens of their kind; yet in such cases, we ascribe the inferiority to accidental defects, and regard them as exceptions to the general rule. Nay, such accidental variations may be so multiplied in numbers, and cherished by peculiarity of position or education, as to form a majority of cases among the whole race; notwithstanding, we still judge of the true character of the species by its most perfect specimens. Now, let us only apply this rule of philosophy to man as well as to other living creatures.

Under this explanation, I contend, that a couple of such young married persons of the present generation, and placed in circumstances similar to those of Adam and Eve, would be as innocent and pure in their character as our first parents were before the fall.

In order to demonstrate this, we must contemplate their actual or probable conduct, in reference to some standard of morality; and for this purpose let us take what is assumed (at least in the popular doctrine) as the summary

of the moral law, namely, the ten commandments of Moses. I do not indeed admit the decalogue to be such a summary, for reasons already stated; but for the purpose of a comparison, and in regard of its being so viewed by the advocates of the popular system, it will serve our purpose. Now, I would ask in reference to the first commandment, how it could possibly enter into the heads of our young people, that there was any other God than Him from whom they had consciously received their being, by whom they were visibly supplied with all the comforts they enjoyed, and who showed them daily evidences of his power and authority over all nature? In respect of the second commandment, what could tempt them to worship images instead of Him? And as to the third, it was morally impossible that they could speak or think irreverently of one to whom they were under such palpable obligations.

We ought to consider that the great temptation, or rather the obvious *cause* why *we* are apt to feel and to act contrary to the above precepts, is, that we came into the world in a manner that rendered us quite unconscious of having received our existence from God, or of feeling our dependance upon him. The Deity is absent and invisible *to us*, and all the gifts which religion may afterwards teach us to ascribe ultimately to God, come in the first instance visibly and immediately through the channel of other persons and means. Under *such circumstances*, it requires time and study to arrive at the true idea of the Deity and of our relation to him, and still longer, before we can feel such sentiments habitually. In the meanwhile, men often form false ideas from the superstitions and corruptions prevailing in the age in which they live; and in the best times, the world, the things *which are seen*, and the whole course of events, apparently proceeding without any superior agency or interference, all these circumstances tend to oppose, to weaken, and to obliterate the truths of religion.

From all such influences, Adam was free, and so would our young couple, if they were placed in a similar situation. For instance, let us suppose that on their bridal-day they were transported miraculously to a beautiful and fertile island, planted like the garden of Eden with every thing “sweet to the sense and lovely to the eye,” and where they would have communication with a celestial being, the proprietor of the place, and their special friend and benefactor. Can it be doubted that they would love and reverence him with their whole hearts? But, to complete the parallel, we must suppose a perfect oblivion of the past, and of course of all regret for other friends from whom they had parted, and of other things, the recollecting which, might engender distraction of mind or discontent. The question is, could our intelligent and amiable pair feel otherwise than grateful and devoted to their celestial friend? There can be no doubt; and therefore, in so far as regards the principle of piety, they might, in such circumstances, be as perfect as our first parents were in paradise.

Now, it is obvious, that this natural state of feeling and conduct towards their Maker or Friend, was in both cases the result of those circumstances in which the parties were placed. Their moral constitution and disposition, might or might not be the same at bottom; but their *situation* was perfectly sufficient to account for and to produce the effects in question, and therefore no inference can be drawn from the fact of Adam’s primitive innocence and piety, in favour of the alleged difference of his moral constitution.

The same remark holds true of the other commandments. “To rest on the seventh day,” would be only an agreeable relaxation, if indeed the moderate exercise of our first parents and our favoured pair, in dressing the garden of their respective paradises, was productive of any fatigue. And if not, the pleasure of strolling about at their ease, to review their labours—of making an excursion, haply, beyond the precincts of their garden, to

survey the wider scenes of wild nature, or to watch for the visits of their celestial friend, vouchsafed more regularly on that day of repose,—such circumstances as these, would make the recurrence of the Sabbath both “delightful and honourable.” With respect to the fifth commandment in paradise, when there was no person to honour but God, and as he stood in all the relations of father and superior to them, the keeping of this commandment was just the same as that of the three first, and equivalent to the love of God. In the same manner, the love of his neighbour, and the love of his wife, were the same thing to Adam, and to our young man; and of that, they were equally capable. And here we may add, that so far as matrimonial infidelity was in the question, neither of them had the temptation nor the means of breaking the seventh commandment.

We come now to the precepts which forbid to kill, to steal, to lie, and to covet. These all refer to a state of society, and to temptations arising out of it, to which persons in the circumstances of our first parents, must be utter strangers. These commandments all refer to the moral code of Justice, and to persons living under that code; but our first parents, or any other similarly situated, were precisely in the condition supposed by Hume, where, from the abundance and community of all things that man requires or covets, there could be no place for the rules of Justice. Consequently, the mere circumstance of people in such a situation being *negatively* innocent of crimes which *we* often witness, proves nothing at all respecting their moral strength or weakness. It is distinctly the result of their condition.

I have adverted to these ten commandments in detail, chiefly in the way of “an argument upon their own principles,” with those persons who teach that the decalogue is a summary of the Moral Law; and who assert that Adam fulfilled the precepts of such a law, merely because we have no record of his breaking them, or because it pleaseth

such teachers to assume that he would not have broken them. We have shown, that hundreds and thousands of his posterity would, under the same circumstances, have done as well as he.

But let us take a more comprehensive view of moral character, and endeavour to ascertain whether there was any difference between our first parents and ourselves, in the more active class of moral qualities and habits; and particularly in those which belong to the code of Benevolence, and to the high state of intellectual improvement or energy. How did the matter stand with them, and how does it stand *naturally* with us, on the one hand, in respect of that active spirit of love, in which consists the fulfilment of the true moral law, or, on the other hand, in respect of that individual *selfishness* which is the root of all evil? The consideration of this will open up to our view certain elements of human character, and certain influences which modify them; and from a clear view and attention to which, we shall be able to solve some of the greatest difficulties which have been felt on our subject.

In the infancy of man, ere yet he has passed through the government of Authority and of Justice, and ere he has yet acquired that development of intellect, and that extensive philanthropy which qualifies him for the reign of Benevolence—even in his infancy, we say, he possessed and does still possess certain instincts akin to those of Benevolence; and which are susceptible, under favourable circumstances, and in a limited sphere, of producing almost all the practical benefits of that more sublime and comprehensive principle. I allude to the instinct of domestic love. This was the best ingredient in the happiness of our first parents in paradise; and the only *moral sentiment* of which they were susceptible, next to the love and honour they felt for their Maker. Yet, in the domestic circle of a good and happy family, such as we may find numerous examples of in every age, this pure principle of domestic love may be found as perfect as it was, or could be, in paradise, and for the same reasons.

The man and his wife having no separate interests and views, *therefore*, they love each other as “themselves,” thus fulfilling the great precept of Christianity and Benevolence, unconsciously perhaps, yet substantially; and receiving the reward of it in their bosoms. Again, it is beyond all question, that parents love their children “as themselves;” and on the other hand, the return of affection and of respect by the children to their parents, is a moral sentiment of the purest and the highest order. In short, it is because all things are common in a family, that love is the reigning principle of domestic society. And hence it is, that in such a family, and in every family, so far as they are animated by this principle, *home* has ever been compared to *Heaven*—“sweet home”!—and alas! for those who have no such home; the world in all its plenitude, can afford them no compensation for the want. Now, in these respects, we ask what superiority could there be in the family of Adam, in paradise, above such a family as we have mentioned out of it? None, so far as regards the domestic principle of love, for that was common to both; and we shall immediately see, that in certain opposing principles, there was more similarity between them, than is commonly imagined.

CHAPTER VII.

IF we follow the members of the best ordered and most affectionate family out of their domestic circle, we behold them immediately getting into contact and competition with people who have opposite views and interests from their own. We see them compelled to act upon a different principle from their domestic one. In short, the influence of *selfishness* commences. Even before it runs to any palpable excess, men feel themselves *obliged* to provide for their own families, preferably to all others. Although they were *disposed*, they *cannot* extend their regard to,

nor perceptibly promote the happiness of the millions that surround them. Thus a sentiment of indifference to the welfare of others is engendered; and in addition to this, there are found too many temptations arising out of a complex state of society, which give a baleful force and preponderance to the feelings of selfishness, and which weaken or obliterate those of benevolence.

So distinct indeed is our experience and observation of this fact, that in all ages “the world,” that is to say, man out of his domestic circle, has been regarded as selfish, cruel, and wicked. And for the same reason, “the world” is in like manner contrasted and opposed by Christ, to the “kingdom of God” which he was to establish; for in it, the principles of moral feeling and action are precisely the same with those of the domestic circle, namely, love—conjugal, parental, brotherly, and filial. To this identity of principles, between the incipient and the most perfect state of society, we shall have a future occasion to advert more pointedly. Our object in noticing it at present is, only to mark its character, and to show, that society in every age of the world, has been under the influence of two opposite sets of principles and circumstances, which affect the character of men, for good or for evil. And in this respect, we have to remark, that the condition of our first parents was similar in its general circumstances to our own, although differing in some local peculiarities.

They enjoyed all the blessings and advantages of domestic society in the most favourable circumstances. They had no *external world* to draw them from the bosom of home, or to wound them when out of it; and so far, they had *no temptations like ours*. But as the grand purpose of their creation as intelligent and moral beings, was, to be trained up to higher principles, and to a more sublime character and happiness, than what could spring from the mere force of *instinct* and of *condition*; namely, to a wisdom and happiness, which can only be the result of knowledge, of experience, and of confirmed habits; therefore, it

was necessary, that they should be exposed to *other temptations*, as the proper means of exercising their faculties, and of being individually proved and instructed. But as they stood in none of those relations and circumstances towards other persons, out of which spring the common duties of man, Adam was furnished with a test and exercise of his moral conduct suitable to his position. The command, “not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree”—although it may have appeared childish to some persons—was yet a proper means for that purpose. It was calculated to ascertain whether he would control the propensities of his animal nature, and keep them in subjection to his reason and to his will, as moral agents ought to do, and in which consists the very essence of their virtue.

This temptation was to our first parents, what the temptations of “the world” are to us. The general influence of the world is, to impose upon us what is present and striking to our senses, or apparently for our immediate interests, in opposition to those views which reason would take of them in the ultimate consequences. In the language of Scripture, it tries our *faith* and patience. In like manner, the prohibition of eating a certain fruit, was a trial of their faith. Our first parents had been told, that in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit, they should die; an intimation which must have conveyed to their minds, something like the idea, that the fruit of the tree in question was poisonous, in opposition to the medicinal and invigorating qualities of the Tree of Life. But perceiving the serpent eat of it without injury, they might be induced to doubt the truth of their Maker’s assertion, and some such thoughts would arise in *their* minds which frequently arise in *our* minds, when first tempted to indulge in unlawful gratifications.

The thing in question, or the line of conduct contemplated, may not appear to us under its proper aspect. It may seem to be innocent (in its own nature), perhaps profitable, beautiful, or good. We may have seen others

indulge a *little* without harm, or even with apparent advantage; at all events, we flatter ourselves that we shall stop in time if we feel it hurtful, and nobody will know of our secret experiment. Thus we are deceived by false appearances and reasoning, as well as instigated by appetite or passion. In such respects, it is obvious that the temptation to which Adam and Eve were exposed, and those to which we are exposed, are similar in design and tendency. And as we thus see that their case was similar to our own, in respect of such temptation, even while they were yet in paradise; let us next see whether their conduct was different from what frequently occurs among their children, and whether they gave proof of any superior firmness of mind and nobleness of character?

Alas! "they were weak as we are," or rather, weaker. *They* fell at once; whereas *we* have upon many occasions resisted for a time, and frequently triumphed over temptations more seducing and more urgent than theirs. The fact is, that if they were superior to us before the eating of the forbidden fruit—in having had no bad habits, no sense of previous guilt, and no prejudices or errors—they were inferior to us in experience; and this experience of ours, has frequently done for us, what their previous innocence and purity was unable to do for them. The conclusion is, that they were liable to like passions, infirmities, and errors with ourselves; that is to say, they had the same moral constitution and character that we have. The whole difference lay in the different circumstances in which they and we have been placed; and therefore, was (as we have asserted) wholly *external* in its nature.

While we contend, however, for the identity of moral constitution in the case of Adam and his posterity, it is not meant to deny, that mankind were great losers by his fall. They might possibly have suffered the same consequences from their own personal fault, if they had not occurred through him; but as it did happen, the consequences of the fall to his posterity were as follows:—In the first

place, they were deprived of that visible and audible intercourse with the Divinity, which was enjoyed in paradise, and which completely preserved our first parents, as it still would preserve us, from all scepticism about the existence and providence of God. In the second place, being no longer amply provided with all the comforts of life, which were furnished by the extraordinary fertility and finished culture of paradise; they were compelled to labour, and to attain the necessaries of life with difficulty; consequently, the motives and occasions of *selfishness* multiplied in number and increased in urgency. Thirdly, they were no longer protected so efficiently against the diseases and dissolution of the body. From these three causes, spring a great many of the vices and miseries of mankind; and hence it was true, in point of fact (although not perhaps in the sense that he meant), what our poet has said about the eating of the forbidden fruit, it “brought death into the world, and all our woe.”

This was the fact; but it did not arise from any change or deterioration in the moral constitution of human nature, but simply from a change of the external circumstances in which it was placed. Yet even these results of man's expulsion from paradise, however extensive in their influence, have not been the sole and direct source of all that corruption and moral evil which has abounded in the world. There have been other circumstances, over which Adam had no control, which did not come into operation till long after his death; but which have proved the immediate and active causes of the greatest corruptions of society. For, while Adam and Noah lived, and that was for about two thousand years after the creation, the knowledge of God, and a system of patriarchal government, were still preserved among men; and these were sufficient to keep the world from that idolatry, superstition, and state of perpetual warfare, and consequent slavery, by which mankind were so miserably afflicted for the two thousand years which followed. We repeat, that idolatry, superstition, war, and

slavery, were not the direct and immediate consequences of the fall, but the result of circumstances which arose long after the death of Adam.

I trust that it has now been sufficiently proved, that the common opinion concerning the *fall* of man, is by no means a direct doctrine, or even a clear inference from other doctrines of the Sacred Writings. But still it may be said, “the Scriptures evidently assume, that mankind are in some corrupt and fallen state; and that evil, both natural and moral, prevails to such an extent in the world, that we cannot so well account for it upon any other hypothesis.”

It will be our endeavour, however, to give a better account; and we shall be able to do so the more easily, that we have exposed the weakness of an unfounded hypothesis. And here let me impress it on the minds of a certain class of my readers, that while I deny the common doctrine of the *fall*, I do not adopt those views of human nature, which have been given by certain theologians and moralists, who go into an opposite extreme in their account of the matter, by alleging that man is born without any seeds of evil in his constitution; that all his errors are the effects of bad education and example; and that every one has natural and personal power to form his own character, and to regulate his actions by the principles of a perfect and consistent rectitude. On the contrary, we assert that the seeds of moral evil exist in every infant from its birth; but we assert likewise, that the same seeds of evil existed in Adam and Eve on their first creation; and these are, Ignorance, Inexperience, and the necessary ascendancy of our Animal propensities, before our intellectual and moral faculties are matured.

So far, Evil in some degree, more or less, is the natural result of our constitution—of the imperfection of infant beings, who have every thing to *learn* and to *acquire*, and virtue among the rest. With such a constitution, and in unfavourable circumstances, moral evil is the necessary

result; and the circumstances in which mankind have hitherto been placed, have been unfavourable, so that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”—of that true end and design of their being, whereby God would be glorified.

The unfavourable circumstances to which I refer, are those by which mankind were left, in a great measure, to their own natural powers and resources. We are naturally, and in the first instance, the weakest and the poorest creatures that God hath made; and in regard to those things which it is necessary or useful for us to know, we are likewise the most ignorant. All other living creatures are furnished with food, clothing, places of shelter, and means of defence or safety, and they are directed by unerring instincts. But in regard to all such animal wants, and which are the greatest of all wants, as being essential to existence, man is poor and weak. He can only find a compensation for all his disadvantages, in the resources of his mind. But mind of itself, is only a *capacity* of which we cannot avail ourselves till we acquire *knowledge*; and all the knowledge which a single individual could attain by his own observations and experiments, in the course of his individual life, would be of little avail. All the arts of life, even the most simple, are the result of the communicated and accumulated knowledge, or experience, of contemporary multitudes and of succeeding generations. The progress of mankind, therefore, is necessarily slow, and frequently interrupted by the natural catastrophes of famine, disease, and tempests; or by the moral catastrophes of war, of despotism, and of slavery.

Now, as mankind have been manifestly left, in a great measure, to the natural influences and consequences of their condition,—in these respects, the occurrence and the prevalence of evil, was a natural and necessary result *in the first instance*, and must have been contemplated and so far designed by our Maker.

But He did not leave mankind entirely to themselves.

The design of his Providence was to educate them, and to raise them, by certain means, from their natural condition with all its attendant defects and evils, to an improved and exalted condition, in which the prevalence of evil and of misery would be destroyed, and the reign of happiness and of good would be established. In this view, the constitution of the world and of human nature, were formed and adapted to each other. In this *design* we discover the *origin* of evil, and the reason of its temporary prevalence; and from the development and perfection of this design, we look for the triumph of truth, of virtue, and of happiness. It follows, that neither individuals nor single generations of men, can attain to the maturity of their faculties; and therefore our next business is to show, how the plan of Providence is adapted to the constitution of such moral and intellectual beings as we are, and calculated to accomplish our ultimate perfection as a *species*. With regard to the sufferings of individuals in the early stage of it, the arrangements of a future state may compensate them; but I merely allude to this in passing, and to stop an objection. Our subject is, the plan itself as it has been, or will be developed and matured in the *present world*; and that plan we affirm to be a wise and a good one—sufficient to account for the past evil, and to give confidence to the hope of the future good.

It is not necessary that we should be able to assert, or to know, that it is the best of all possible plans. There is a variety in all the works of God, even in this world, and some are better and more beautiful than others; so it may be, of the varied worlds in the universe. But, while it is not necessary to prove our constitution the best of all, yet we should know, in what the excellency of it consists. Now, its chief characteristic and excellency is this, that from raw materials (if we may so speak) apparently unsuitable to the purpose, there should ultimately be produced a fabric of excellent qualities and surpassing beauty, such as could not have been made by the direct

influence of unerring instinct, and the force of uncontrollable circumstances. And so far, indeed, as this ultimate prevalence of good over evil is concerned, such a consummation has been the instinctive desire and hope of mankind since the world began. But such moral instinct only groped blindly for its object. It is for us now, in this advanced age of the world, and stage of its progressive improvement, to trace the plan distinctly; to observe what is accomplished; to determine our place on the road, and to take a view of the promised land which lies before us.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE have seen the true account of human nature (we mean of society, or of man as a species) to be this,—that it commences in a state of infancy, and is destined to pass by degrees, and through certain stages, to maturity. This is the result of our intellectual and moral constitution—a constitution which cannot be developed and perfected, as in the lower animals, during the lives of individuals, and especially in those early ages, while men have not yet acquired the knowledge, the experience, and the habits requisite for its perfection. Now, as it was worthy of God to form such a design, and to adapt our faculties and the laws of nature to it, so it was likewise worthy of him, or rather it followed as a necessary consequence, that he should provide means for carrying forward such a plan, and that he should guard its success by a special providence.

It appears, accordingly, by the history of Moses, and by the traditions of the ancients, that mankind had been furnished by Revelation, with various pieces of useful and necessary knowledge, by which, they were enabled to *commence* the improvement of their condition, and the progress of civilization. It is obvious, indeed, that if the first pair had been created in the *infant state* as to bodily

faculties, they must have perished. But the maturity of their bodily powers would have been of little avail, if their mental faculties had not also been called into exercise, by the communication of some elementary knowledge. It has even been supposed by some philosophers, and upon very plausible grounds, that *language*, which is the organ by which all our mental processes are conducted, must have been communicated to our first parents by express teaching, or bestowed by a special miraculous gift. It was not, and could not have been *invented* by them. Accordingly, it appears by the Scriptures, that it was bestowed in some such manner on Adam and Eve; for they are represented as having the power of speech—of communing with one another and with their Maker, and of giving names to the various animals which were presented to them, in the earliest days of their existence.

By this gift of speech, the Deity called their latent faculties into exercise, where they might have remained dormant for a long time, if not for ever; and this method of calling forth and exciting dormant faculties, constitutes the very principle of the Divine Government, which we are to trace in other instances, and in the further history of man. It is a system founded upon fixed laws as a general rule; by the knowledge and application of which, man may operate to influence his own character and condition; but to which line of conduct he must be prompted, and in which he must be aided as occasion requires, by instruction and interference from Heaven.

The planting of the garden of Eden, and the art of agriculture practised immediately after their expulsion from it, are instances of this sort, in which special assistance and instruction must have been given to the primeval family; for we know that many tribes of mankind (savages), who have unfortunately lost the knowledge of such arts, have remained for generations ignorant of them, and contented to live like the beasts of prey, or the cattle of the field, upon what nature might offer casually to them, as to other

animals. In such cases, it appears that they never emerge from the savage state, till they are incited and taught by others in a more advanced state of civilization; or till some extraordinary person arise among them, who may be considered as *inspired* by the Deity with peculiar gifts, on purpose to awaken and guide the dormant powers of the public mind. In the early ages of society, such persons were not only venerated as inspired sages, but succeeding generations, sensible of the benefits conferred by them, have even ranked them as gods, and made them objects of worship. And although this was an abuse, yet the fact still proves, that man in his natural state, is incapable of appreciating and using his mental powers, without external incitement and instruction, and that he is conscious of this incapacity. It follows that the first generations of mankind, who appear, by the book of Genesis, to have attained a considerable degree of civilization, and never to have been in the *savage state*, must have been originally instructed, in many things, by God himself, or by individuals specially inspired by him for that purpose, in order that the plan of his Providence might be put in motion.

But if this was necessary with regard to the common arts of life, it was still more necessary and important with respect to moral science. Society is essentially a moral union of individuals. The points of contact in which our personal interests meet and oppose each other, are so numerous and urgent, that it is impossible for men to enjoy the benefits of association, without the acknowledgment of, and submission to, some rules of morality. The domestic instincts may preserve a single family in union, but whenever we go beyond that circle, some other principle or law is essential to the existence and progress of society. But in the rude ages of the world, before men have acquired the experience and the habits requisite to frame and to observe systems of law and government, no principle is so powerful, no precepts so authoritative as those of religion. The history of all nations is an evidence of

this. Man is as truly a religious being, as he is of an intellectual and moral constitution. In his infancy (whether social or individual) his instinct responds to the sentiment of religion. In a state of maturity, his reason confirms it. In the first stage, it supplies the place of other law and authority. In the latter stage, religion first sanctions all just laws and government, and afterwards carries us forward to voluntary principles of action, still more effective and sublime.

It was therefore of special importance to the success of the general plan of Providence, or of human affairs, that the first generation of mankind should be instructed in the elementary principles of religion. In this view, the probation of our first parents in paradise, conveyed a grand moral lesson, which, though frequently misinterpreted, has never been wholly forgotten by their posterity. It communicated to man the distinct idea of a Deity, the Creator and Preserver of all things, and who would require and take an account of human actions. This, we say, was the lesson of man's original position in paradise and expulsion from it—impressed indelibly on the mind of Adam, and communicated, no doubt, by him, to his numerous descendants who had an opportunity of hearing it from his own lips for upwards of nine hundred years. At all events, this tradition was distinctly preserved to and by the family of Noah, and from him the belief of a Supreme Being and his providence, under some form or another, has been transmitted and preserved among all the tribes, and all the ages of mankind.

This universal belief has been regarded by some as the evidence of an alleged innate idea, or at least as the result of what obviously strikes the reason even of the most untutored savage, as an inference from the works of Nature. But I question the accuracy of those opinions, and, at any rate, such an explanation of the fact is unnecessary.

The doctrine of a God, like the use of language, is a thing which, although untutored man might never have

found out, yet when once known it could never be forgotten. In the case of language, it is obvious, that as no human beings can pass through the stages of infancy and childhood, without support from, and communication with, their parents, or other adult persons, who had the use of speech; therefore children necessarily learn to speak also. But what do men speak about to their children? Of course, the most simple elements of knowledge and sources of feeling. And what so simple, so interesting, and of so common occurrence among mankind, as allusions of one sort or another, to their belief in a being or beings of superior power to themselves? Thus, with the use of language, there is handed down from every generation to another, some of the elementary ideas with which it was originally conversant. The cases in which the idea of a God has been almost lost among certain tribes, are so few and in such extreme states of degraded humanity, that they can scarcely be regarded as an exception to the general fact; and with regard to the cases of individual sceptics in modern times, they stand upon a peculiar ground, which neither invalidates the historical evidence of the general tradition, nor our account of its origin.

In the circumstances of our first parents' probation in paradise, we trace, therefore, the commencement of that system of Revelation, which was necessary to awaken and to guide the moral sentiments of mankind; and which contributed, along with the elements of natural science, to set in motion that scheme of *progressive improvement*, which the future history of society was to develope in the course of ages. We repeat, that such a primary instruction was necessary, both as regards the common arts of life, and the sentiments of morality; and, therefore, it was given simultaneously in both instances, and at the beginning. But there was this difference in the two subjects. The elements of natural science, when once communicated, could not be perverted, and mankind were competent to develope and apply them without

farther supernatural aid. But the elementary truths of religion or of moral science, were capable of such a perversion, that instead of contributing to the happiness and improvement of mankind, they might become the source of misery and corruption. This is palpable in the instances of idolatry and superstition. It was not enough, therefore, to give one primary lesson to mankind on the subject of moral science. It was necessary that such lessons should be repeated and confirmed from time to time, and suited to the age and circumstances of the world. Hence Revelation, although an extraordinary and only occasional operation in the system of the Divine Government, yet it formed an integral and essential part thereof.

Accordingly, when, after the death of Noah, men began to forget and to corrupt the doctrine of religion and morality, it pleased God to select a particular family who might be the depositories of the truth, which had been primarily communicated to mankind, and of those farther revelations which should be requisite for their instruction. The patriarch of this family was Abraham, and his posterity afterwards became a nation, under the name of the Israelites or the Jews. We are not to suppose, however, that such moral instruction was entirely confined to this peculiar people; but to none was it bestowed so authoritatively or distinctly, and connected with such special arrangements for its preservation and farther development. Melchisedec and Job among the Syrians and Arabians, Zoroaster among the Persians, and Socrates among the Greeks, were all men on whom the Spirit of God rested, but it was not accompanied by those miraculous gifts which distinguished the Prophets of Israel.

But the instructions given by those "holy men of old," were only partial, and adapted to the age and country in which they lived. The unity and spirituality of the Divine Being, the maxims of justice generally, and a few of the more obvious precepts of humanity, were all that was known to them. Yet the effects of such knowledge

on those who were influenced by it, as compared with the effects of the general ignorance, superstition, and barbarity, into which the rest of the world had fallen—this difference, we say, was vast, and showed the importance of Divine revelation and interference, to the welfare of mankind.

In the history of the chosen people, we find, indeed, many instances of conduct and of manners, which are very revolting to our modern feelings of propriety; but we ought to consider, that it is unfair to judge of a rude people by our modern notions of refinement. The spirit of the age must always be taken into account, and that frequently determines men to actions which are positively vicious, while the individual is unconscious of doing wrong. It is not very long since things were done by our forefathers, which we condemn without hesitation; such as their persecution of each other, even to death and by torments, for differing about abstract dogmas of faith; and yet we revere these men on other accounts, for many excellent qualities which they possessed, and for good deeds which they performed. We ascribe their faults to the spirit of the age in which they lived. We ought to do the same thing in judging of the Israelites; and when we consider how gross the ignorance, the superstition, and immorality of the surrounding nations were, the allowance to be made for their manners, as compared with ours, should be very large.

It is enough, that they were better than the heathen; for, according to the view we have taken of the plan of Providence in the education of the world, it was not expected that they could attain to the higher knowledge and morality of later times. Indeed, the whole of their institutions were confessedly adapted to a rude and infant state of society. They were in that stage, when men require to be governed by authority; and that, too, of a strong and despotic description. Such, accordingly, was the character of their religious rites; and Jehovah, to

whom the people owed alike civil and religious submission, avowedly declared himself to be "a jealous God." Obedience to his laws, was enforced by such unrelenting severity, as might have driven the people to despair and rebellion, if the rigour of their law had not been softened, by the mercy which was extended to the penitent, through the medium of sacrifices. This was a singular kind of government, but it was adapted to the age, and it answered its end.

It was adapted to the age; for we can easily conceive how difficult it must have been, to train a small people to a peculiar faith and institutions, in the midst of surrounding nations having different opinions and customs—opinions and customs gratifying to the prejudices and passions of a barbarous state of society. To accomplish this, required the exercise of a powerful authority, on the one hand, to coerce the refractory; and on the other, of a special provision to tranquillize offenders, and to invite or encourage them to repentance. The Israelites were like children, who may alternately require to be corrected by blows and coaxed by caresses. The good things promised to them in case of obedience, were, for a similar reason, as palpable and immediate as their punishments for disobedience. They were to be felt alike in the present life. We have said, that we might conceive the necessity of such measures to rescue a specific nation from the prevailing errors and corruptions of the world; and their history shows how the fact stood. The chosen people, for a long time, were constantly relapsing into the idolatry and abominations of the heathen; they could not, in their own strength, withstand the spirit of their age. The immediate judgments of heaven were necessary to correct them, and to restore the authority and laws of their theocracy, from time to time.

This singular kind of government, we have likewise said, ultimately answered its end. The Jews were at length cured of their proneness to idolatry, and became

the zealous advocates and witnesses of a pure Theism. They even suffered the most violent persecutions, on account of their faith, with heroic fortitude. They established their customs and their principles at home, and afterwards propagated them with success among the Greek and Roman provinces; so that, by the commencement of the Christian era, synagogues of Jews and their proselytes, were to be found in almost all the principal cities of the empire. It is worthy of remark here, that as soon as this purpose was accomplished, the extraordinary interference of Providence, in the affairs of the Jews, ceased. The series of their Prophets was closed, and the fate of their nation followed, and was affected by those of the Greek and Roman governments, in the usual course of things. They were specially cared for, no doubt, till the appearance of Messiah; but it was no longer by any visible departure from the general laws of nature and of society. They had, by this time, attained the capacity of acting for themselves, and of being influenced by new and higher principles of conduct. Among these symptoms of growing intellect, their belief in a future state, and their reference to it for the ultimate rewards of righteousness, was contemporary with their deliverance from their passion for idolatry; that is to say, it was after their restoration from the seventy years captivity.

It has been alleged, that the Jews learned this doctrine, and became convinced at last, of the doctrine of the Divine Unity, by their residence among the Persians, who were not idolaters, and who entertained some speculations about the future state. It is highly probable, that these circumstances contributed to the establishment of their faith. They were, during their captivity, separated from the example and seduction of the Canaanites. But the strong hold which the doctrines of the Divine Unity and of a Future State, took on the spirit of the Jews after their restoration, cannot be accounted for, without reference to the authoritative declarations of their own Scriptures,

especially on the subject of the former. There is no comparison between the zeal which the Jews manifested in its defence, or between the general prevalence of their belief in the resurrection, and any thing similar shown by the Persians. We are entitled therefore to say, that the doctrine of the Divine Unity, and that of a final judgment, in favour of truth and righteousness, formed the end or object of the Jewish dispensation, and it was attained. There was some darkness, indeed, about the *time* of the final judgment; and in the early stage of their education, the Jews looked for it, and in some respects received it in this life. Farther experience and reflection, taught them to extend their views to a future state; and thus the principles of what we now call natural religion were established in the world, through means of the Jewish institutions.

We have said, in an early part of this chapter, that in the first ages of the world, when men are naturally credulous rather than sceptical, religion was a powerful accessory to the influence of authority, and the one was generally taken to the aid of the other. The laws of Moses, and the mission of the Prophets, were founded on this principle; but while other religious systems tended to arrest and even to debase the human mind, the Jewish institute improved and carried it forward. This may be observed in other instances than those already quoted. In the first place, it incorporated and preserved much of what was useful in the patriarchal or domestic age. The ties of brotherhood—the equality of all, in their most essential privileges—their general equality even in property—the restoration of inheritances at the jubilee—the interdiction of slavery among themselves, and various injunctions in favour of humanity; all these, and similar laws or customs, kept up the sentiment of domestic society. And although this is not a principle which can be extended to all nations, and enforced by law in the ordinary course of things; and therefore, must give way to other principles

in the common progress of society; yet the cherishing and preservation of it, under the peculiar circumstances of the Jewish nation, was useful, in furnishing a means by which the more extensive principle of benevolence could, in due time, be illustrated and propagated with more advantage.

In the meanwhile, the laws of Moses provided also a code of justice, suited to the age of the world. And this was a matter of great importance, for in the rude ages of society, men have always found much difficulty in determining and defining, even those simple laws which habit has made us regard as the easy dictates of common sense. The Greeks laboured long under those difficulties, and after Rome had made considerable advances towards empire, she had to send to Greece for materials to form the laws of the twelve tables, as a treasure beyond the reach of her own intellectual capacity.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the previous Chapter, we took a general view of the necessity and benefit of divine revelations to mankind in the early ages of the world, in respect even of the first elements of natural science, and still more so, in those of moral science or religion. We remarked, that from the nature of the subject, this system of supernatural instruction and guidance, required to be continued longer in the case of religion than of other things, and that the Jewish Institute was the organ of it, not merely for the benefit of that nation, but for the benefit of the world, by preserving and propagating those principles of natural religion, which lie at the root of all morality, and consequently of all progress in civilization. Accustomed as we now are, to regard such principles as the easy deductions of reason, or the obvious dictate of common sense, we are apt to be insensible of the difficulty which men felt to acquire them, in the infant ages of the world. But the

history of antiquity, proves this most distinctly to have been the fact. The traditions of the patriarchal age, had, indeed, been preserved in some degree among the Persians, although associated with many errors; but among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, through whose channel the tide of civilization flowed downward to the inhabitants of Western Asia and Europe—all were immersed in the grossest idolatry and superstitions. And these—the two latter especially, were the influential nations, whose learning, customs, and empire, were to give a direction to the opinions and manners of all surrounding countries and succeeding ages. Amidst this mass of moral corruption and ignorance of true religion generally prevalent, the Jewish system was the little leaven which first resisted the demoralizing tendency, and afterwards spread a healthful fermentation of renovating principles in Society.

It seems to have been the design of Providence, in furtherance and illustration of his general plan of education for the human race, to permit those nations who were to be the instructors of the world in *natural* science and arts, to lose almost entirely for a time, the knowledge of true *religion* and *morality*. The grand lesson to be acquired from this part of Providence, is, that man with capacities for great moral and intellectual improvement, can accomplish nothing of himself, without the continued aid of his Maker. By this lesson, mankind are taught their dependance on, and relation to the Deity; not only as their Creator, but as their Moral Governor. They are likewise taught a certain kind and degree of experience and of wisdom, which they could not otherwise have acquired—experience respecting good and evil, truth and error, God and man; on the knowledge of which, all that is most important to the dignity of moral character and to the acquisition of true happiness depends. Such are the reasons, we may presume, why the Egyptians, Phenicians, Greeks, and Romans, were left to themselves in matters of religion; and why the Israelites were instructed

with special care—the one cultivating natural arts and sciences as they could, the other devoted or rather kept to the study of moral science, whether they would or not; till, in fulness of time, the acquisitions of each should be blended together for the benefit of all. We say, all this was in furtherance and illustration of the original plan, by which mankind (as a general rule) were to be left to their own resources, and to the operation of fixed laws; but yet assisted so far as it was necessary to preserve or to excite sentiments which they might otherwise lose or be unable to find.

We have seen how the Jewish religion was, in this respect, the instrument of Providence for good in its day, and how it was more excellent than that of the Gentiles; but there is another point of view in which it is proper also to regard it, namely, in what respect it was defective and provisional, with respect to the destined progress of society. For it has happened, in this as in other similar matters, that men, from the force of habit and prejudice, cling to the customs and spirit of their forefathers, after they cease to be suitable to a more improved age; and thus, things which were once useful and promoted the progress of society, become an impediment to it.

One defective part of the Jewish institution, in this point of view, was, the number and importance of its ceremonies. Ceremony in morals, is nothing but a mean towards an end, or a substitute in point of *form*, to serve, when better cannot be had, for the *substance* of religion—a sort of homage rendered to it, which may preserve it in some esteem with the public, when the personal sentiment is as yet weak or malconformed. A ceremonial system is only suited to the infant state of society, and the power by which it is enforced, is that of mere arbitrary authority. It can neither appeal to reason, nor to justice, nor to a pure moral feeling, in support of its requirements. It regards the Deity as a hard and capricious Master, rather than as a kind Father or Friend.

Connected with this view, we are especially to regard one set of its ceremonies, namely, its *sacrifices*. There has been a good deal of disputation about the origin of sacrifices. Whether they arose from the natural feelings and prejudices of mankind? or were of divine appointment, and whether they were originally *offerings* or *expiations*? We do not enter into these questions however, and our future remarks will be independent of them. It is sufficient to remark, that by the time of Moses and during the history of the Israelites and Jews, mankind had imbibed the idea (no matter how) that God was naturally (so to speak) of a severe and harsh character, and required to be moved by some external means to the exercise of mercy. The institutions of Moses recognised such a sentiment, and were adapted to it. Hence the maxim of his laws, even in regard to the most trifling matters, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them.” In one sense, indeed, this may be said to be the maxim of all laws that ever were made; they denounce punishment against all who disregard their commandments. But in enlightened ages, the law discriminates between different degrees of offence, according to the motives or circumstances of the offender; it reserves to the chief of the state, the power of pardon and commutation; it gives the penitent the means of repairing his errors, in many cases, by pecuniary compensation, or fine,—and it is the glory of all modern lawgivers, that they take care to temper justice with mercy. But this was not the spirit of the Mosaic Law. It was stern and indiscriminate—not making allowance even for ignorance or inadvertence, on the more trifling matter of ceremony. Every offence required a special expiatory sacrifice or a periodical general sacrifice, in which it might be generally but still formally included.

Now we say, that this was a grovelling and defective spirit—the result of ignorance and barbarity. The adaptation of the Jewish law to this spirit of the times, was

only an accommodation to circumstances—a temporary and provisional arrangement, to govern men by the means and motives of which they were susceptible. Some men must be deterred by the terror of such a law, from infringing its precepts; and when they had offended and were penitent, they required to be soothed by some special and palpable token of the remission of their sins—that is to say, by an *atonement* for it. They were incapable of being influenced by the principle of love, and of a willing obedience to a paternal and benevolent Deity; and for that reason, they could have no confidence in his mercy, without some sensible token of it.

I have said, that this was the spirit of the people and of the times; and the institute of a severe law, and of sacrificial atonements, was adapted to it. But it is evident by the writings of the Prophets, that so far from it being the design of Providence to train the spirit of mankind to such a system, it was the constant aim of those inspired teachers to raise men above it. Accordingly, they are unceasing in the declarations and praises of the spontaneous mercy of God, as “enduring for ever”—“that as a father pitied his children, so the Lord pitied those that feared him; remembering their frame, that they were but dust,” &c. At other times, the Prophets reprobate the idea of men recommending themselves to the favour of God by ceremonies, and declare, that “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of lambs”—“to what purpose, saith the Lord, is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me; I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats—they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them; wash you, make you clean, cease to do evil, learn to do well: such are the sacrifices with which I am pleased.” What can be more evident from such passages as these, which abound in the Prophets, that it never was the design of the Deity, either in instituting or in legalizing sacrificial atonements, to teach, that he required *to be made merciful* by such means?

Quite the contrary; they were intended to *assure those penitents*, who, from their ignorance and superstition, were fearful and incredulous on the subject, that he was innately merciful, and ready to forgive sin when it was forsaken, and when the ways of the sinner were amended. And this assurance was given them in a manner suited to their capacities, prejudices, and customs. But when such external token was relied upon, without reference to the moral qualifications of the worshippers, expressed or understood—or when it was supposed to have any thing in itself gratifying to, or influential with, God—or when it impeded or deteriorated any moral duty or feeling of a higher order, *then* it was completely perverted from the design of God, in condescending to authorise it.

But although the doctrine of the Prophets thus furnished a key to open and explain the ritual of the law, yet, in point of fact, the people never fully or generally comprehended their doctrine. They were not yet capable of it. They were yet *children*, as regarded the age of the world or of society. This is not only manifest from their history, but the idea is distinctly noticed by Paul, who was himself at one time deeply imbued with the same spirit; and, upon his authority, we know it to have been the prevailing spirit of his countrymen, even at and after the commencement of the Christian era. “The heir,” says he, “as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, being under government; even so we, when we were *children*, were in *bondage* under the elements of the world; and even yet, ye turn again unto the weak and beggarly elements, desiring again to be in bondage. Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.”

Mankind have always shown a lingering attachment to old forms and ideas; and that is an incidental evil, arising out of the circumstances of any arbitrary custom or obscure idea, having at any time received the sanction or countenance of divine authority; or even the sanction of men, who were on other accounts entitled to reverence.

Shall we therefore conclude, that it would have been better that such things, being of no value, or equivocal and unmeaning in themselves, had never received any such countenance or sanction? No: we must judge of such things by their utility and effects at the time they were appointed or suffered. If they did good at such time, they were necessary and adapted to the age. Men could not comprehend or be influenced, by more enlightened principles. Yet this is no excuse for us, who know, or should know, better things, to remain attached to obsolete customs and ideas.

We think this remark proper, to justify the ways of Providence; but our concern at present is chiefly with the fact—namely, that although the Jewish Institute, as a whole—combining the doctrine of the prophets with the laws and the rites of Moses—was calculated to lead the Israelites forward to higher and purer sentiments than might strike its subjects at first view, yet from the natural prejudices and sluggishness of the human mind, the people generally adhered to the more gross and literal view of it. And the sentiment thereby engendered, and in reference to the relation in which men stood to their Maker, was this,—“that he was a hard Master, difficult to please, and who had subjected them to an inexorable law, which it was, in fact, impossible to obey on all points—a God, whose favour could only be propitiated by bloody sacrifices, costly gifts, and the mediation of priests.” Practically speaking, this was the spirit of the Jewish system—capable enough of awing men into obedience, so far as regards the obvious precepts of justice and the arbitrary commands of authority, but engendering sentiments of *fear* and *superstition* in regard to the Deity, and stinting their social morality to what men were compelled to do by public law, or induced only to do from motives of selfishness.

The Jew—the man governed by the spirit of his age and of his country, stood thus and prayed with himself—

“God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this or another neighbour of mine. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess, I perform all my sacrifices and oblations, I observe the Sabbath and the new moons, and all the ceremonies of thy appointment, or of the traditions of the elders.” This was the orthodox Jew of his day, “concerning the *literal* righteousness of his law, blameless;” but an utter stranger to the charity which thinketh no evil—to the benevolence which is ever active in doing good—to the humility which is so pleasing to God, and so suitable to the worshippers of God. In perfect consistence with his idea of sanctity and justice, this man might still be injurious to, and a persecutor of those who differed from him in their faith and customs; he might contend with every man to the utmost for his legal rights; he might give uncontrolled expression to the feelings of his anger; refuse to forgive offences; turn a deaf ear to the prayer of the needy; in short, care for nothing which was not forced upon him by the fears of superstition, or by the terror of the law.

Such were the religious and moral sentiments of the age, even in this favoured nation. The same cause produced similar effects in the contemporary nations of antiquity, but aggravated by their grosser ignorance, and by the want of that restraint and regulation which the laws of Moses imposed. The root of the whole evil, was the false idea of God, as being a tyrant or a hard and capricious master; and this was rendered so much worse among the heathen, because they not only imputed an arbitrary authority and unrelenting justice to him (or to *them*, for in general they believed in Polytheism), but they likewise imputed passions and vices which would have degraded humanity.

I will close this chapter by an extract from Plutarch on this subject; and although he himself and many others were exceptions to the general character of the heathen, as the Prophets were to the prevailing sentiments of the

Israelites, yet we may understand from his description, what was the prevailing spirit of the Gentile superstitions. With that spirit he contrasts *Atheism*, indeed, as another prevailing sentiment; but we know perfectly well, from general experience, that Atheism or scepticism, has, in all ages, only partially affected the mass of society. The superstitions are always the most numerous; and as he justly observes upon one occasion, Atheism is only engendered by the extravagances of a *reigning* superstition.

“ Our great ignorance of, and unacquaintedness with the Divine Being,” says he, “ runs in two streams, whereof the one in harsh tempers, as in dry and stubborn soils, produces Atheism—the other, in more tender and flexible dispositions, as in moist and yielding grounds, a superstitious fear: yet Atheism, by its disbelief, only brings men to a sort of indifference; but superstition, to a distempered opinion and conceit, productive of such mean and abject apprehensions, as debase and break a man’s spirit, while he thinks there are divine powers indeed, but withal sour and vindictive ones. * * * * Of all fears, none so dozes and confounds, as that of the vain religionary. The man fears not the sea, that never goes to sea; nor a battle, that follows not the camp; nor robbers, that stir not abroad; nor malicious informers, that is a poor man: but he that dreads Divine Power, dreads every thing—the land, the sea, the air, the dark, the light; a sound, a silence, a dream. Even slaves forget their sorrows in sleep, but superstition gives no truce to its votaries, nor suffers the poor soul so much as to breathe or to look up, and respite her sour and dismal thoughts of God for a moment. * * * Alas, that the accomplished Greeks

‘ Should ever have found such rites,
Fitter for eastern slaves and bedlamites,’

as tumbling in mire, rolling themselves in dunghills, keeping of Sabbaths, monstrous prostrations, long and obstinate sittings in a place, vile and abject adorations. * * * * True, indeed, the ignorance of Atheism is very lamentable and sad,

for it deprives the soul of its fairest and brightest eye—the knowledge of God; but superstition is a disordering, ulcerous, frightful, and slavish passion. * * * * If any thing happens amiss to the superstitious man, he looks not to the nature of things, but charges all upon God, from whom he fancies a whole deluge of vengeance to be pouring down upon him, and as if he were not only unfortunate, but in open hostility with heaven; he conceits that he is punished by God, and now making a *satisfaction* for his past crimes. He saith, all my sufferings are just, let me alone, *to pay for my sins, I am a cursed and vile offender, and detestable both to God and to angels*; and all this perhaps, because he happened to eat this thing, or to drink the t'other thing, or to omit some ceremony or observance. * * * * It was a fine saying of Pythagoras, *'that we are then best when we approach the gods'*; but the superstitious person is then at his worst, when he attends the temples and the oratories of the gods; for although the whole place may be filled with the odours of incense and perfumes, tending to produce agreeable sensations, his poor soul is occupied with an uncomfortable mixture of hymns and sighs. He looks pale with a garland on his head; he sacrifices and fears, prays with a faltering tongue; and offers incense with a trembling hand. * * * * What? Is he that holds there is no God, guilty of impiety; and is not he that describes him as the superstitious do, much more guilty? For my own part, I had much rather that people should say of me, that there neither is, nor ever was such a man as Plutarch, than they should say, Plutarch is an unsteady, capricious, vindictive, and touchy fellow. If you invite others to sup with you, and chance to leave out Plutarch; or if some business fall out, that you cannot wait at his door with the morning salutation; or if, when you meet him you do not speak to him, he will fasten upon you somewhere with his teeth, and bite the part through, or catch one of your children and cane him, or turn his beast into your

corn, and spoil your crop. * * * * Moreover, Superstition is worse than Atheism in this respect, that it gave rise to Atheism, and serves it ever since. For men were not at first made Atheists by any fault they found in the heavens, or stars, or seasons of the year, or in those revolutions and motions of the sun about the earth, that make the night and the day; nor yet by observing any mistake or disorder either in the breeding of animals or the production of fruits. No, it was the uncouth actions and senseless passions of Superstition—her canting words, her foolish gestures, her charms, her magic, her freakish processions, her bloody expiations, her vile method of purgation, her inhuman penances, her bemiring at the temples; and worst of all, the horrible sacrifices in some nations, of children for the sins of their parents; or if they had no children of their own, the children were bought from some poor people, and sacrificed like lambs and pigeons.* * * * Amistris, Xerxes' queen, buried twelve men alive as a sacrifice to Pluto, to prolong her own life."

I have preferred giving a view of the Gentile superstition from a heathen author, rather than of drawing a picture of my own; but we may add to that picture of their manners, some notorious features which were not so ready to have shocked a Roman author, or excited his special attention.—1. In the Augustan and succeeding ages of the Empire, the practice of slavery continued with unabated influence, to enthrall the one-half and more of the whole mass of society.—2. The bloody combats of real war, so frequent under the Republic, were succeeded by the no less terrible combats of the gladiators in cold blood, for the sport of barbarous spectators. The numbers of persons slain in this way annually, are stated by historians of the age, at an amount that seems almost incredible to us, surpassing even that of the wars of contending nations.—3. Unnatural passions were still indulged among the men, without that infamy which now attends them; while the venal profligacy of the Roman

ladies, brought many of those of the highest rank and consideration, down almost to the level of prostitutes.—

4. The venality of judges, senators, and persons in power, was such as must have given room for the grossest corruption and injustice.

I am aware that some of these enormities are to be ascribed to the corruption of manners under the Empire, and some allowance ought to be made for the exaggerations of satirists; but enough still remains certain to prove, that the world in that age, notwithstanding all the lights of Greek and Roman literature, and all the benefits of civilization, so far as it had been carried, was yet, in respect of morals, far behind the Jewish nation; while the Gentiles had, at the same time, in one shape or another, all the defects of the Jewish system to boot.

The virtues of the early Romans form no exception to this general conclusion, because they only operated in favour of their own martial superiority over other nations, and not in favour of humanity, or of general society throughout the world. And even so far as they were substantially good for any purpose, they were properly the offspring and remnant of the patriarchal or heroic ages, not the effects of literature and civilization upon the state of morals as society advanced. We say, therefore, that in such advanced era, the state of morals was defective, in comparison to that produced by the Jewish institute.

We might enlarge on this topic, but we have said enough for our purpose. That purpose was, merely to point out the fact, that at the commencement of the Christian era, mankind had as yet made but a small progress in their education and experience, and more especially in regard to morals. They had been hitherto governed chiefly by the influence of authority. The Republics of Greece and of Rome, had indeed introduced and contended for the principles of liberty and of justice. They had sown the seeds of those principles (destined to be imperishable), but as yet they had produced little fruit in the general

character of society. Some of the more obvious maxims of justice, are indeed so necessary to the security of property and personal safety, that they are always acknowledged in proportion as a nation makes progress of any sort, in the arts and habits of civilization. In a comprehensive point of view, however, as affecting the mass and the condition of society in general, the ideas of the ancients on the doctrines of liberty and justice, were still very defective. But if they were defective in their views of Justice, they were much more so (and for the reason assigned in the early period of our discussion) in the principle of Benevolence. In fact, it was never recognised as a motive for public or social conduct, and could hardly be said to govern any individual systematically. The natural sentiment did, no doubt, occasionally animate some persons of more excellent dispositions, as it has prompted others of all ages; but we are speaking of it as an acknowledged and approved principle of general conduct, not to say of triumphant influence. It was reserved for Christianity to teach the principle of Benevolence, in all its consistency; to urge it as a ruling motive; and to inspire it with vigour sufficient to make it triumphant in many individual cases, and ultimately so through the whole mass of society.

We say, that this is the very character and design of Christianity, when rightly understood; and it is in this view that we are now about to consider it. Unfortunately this is a view of it which has been seldom taken, and never hitherto studied in all its bearings and consequences. One, and the principal reason for this neglect and ignorance of its true object, appears to have been, that the world was not as yet capable of appreciating or of being influenced by it. "The light shone in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not." Still it was necessary to sow the seed, to infuse the leaven, although many ages should elapse before the fruit or the effects could be considerable, and much less complete. It was no small evidence, however, of the divine authority and wisdom of its

Founder, that he did not expect the immediate and extensive success of his doctrine. He predicted the contrary, and more especially that it would be so corrupted by the opposing elements with which it should be mixed, or under which it should be buried for a time, that his doctrine, while it was embraced in *name* and in *form*, would be rejected in its *spirit* and *power*. Nevertheless he asserted that it would prevail at last.

These views of its Founder were in exact accordance with the views we have taken of the progress of society; and to understand this better, we must next endeavour to describe and to define what is *peculiar* in Christianity, and to show how it is fitted to accomplish the designs of Providence regarding the education of the human race.

CHAPTER XI.

It will be familiar to most of my readers, that there is a certain class of professing Christians, who are constantly speaking about *the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel*, and who by alleging these to be the same which are peculiar to their own sect, do in virtue of this supposed coincidence, assume rather a high tone. We are about to prove, that its Morality is by far the most *peculiar* and important doctrine of Christianity.

I am aware that this assertion will be received by such people with special prejudice; but they ought to observe, that the thing in favour of which we are about to argue, is not that meagre system of moral precepts, which rests upon mere arbitrary authority, or on the principles of common Justice; such as the Ten Commandments of Moses, and other similar compends. It is a Morality resting upon the principles of Benevolence, as regards man, and as regards God, upon our knowledge of his true character, and our confidence in his truth. It is in this point of view, we contend, that the moral sentiments and precepts of Christianity form its very substance and peculiarity.

The purpose of our present argument, however, requires that we confine our discussion chiefly to that branch of the Christian Morality, which regards the transactions of men with each other in their social relations; and what we have to prove, is this:—1st, That this subject forms a prominent and essential part of Christianity. 2d, That the Christian system of Social Morality is founded expressly on the principle of Benevolence, in contrast to that of Justice and of Authority.

In attempting this proof, I think I am entitled to assume, that whatever our Lord esteemed most essential and peculiar in that doctrine which he was commissioned to teach, will be found in his own personal discourses. We are too much in the habit of regarding the Bible as one entire homogenous book, every part of which may be quoted as of equal authority upon every point. But the doctrine of the Old Testament was avowedly adapted to an inferior and dark dispensation; while the Epistles of the Apostles consist chiefly of special arguments upon Jewish questions and customs, which happened for special reasons to engage the attention of the Christians of *that generation*. The subject of such books therefore, however interesting in itself, is really a different thing from that *New Light* which the Messiah came to reveal, and which was not designed for one age, or for one class of mankind; but for the whole, and to the end of time. Hence he says, “I am the Light of the world; whosoever followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Now, if we listen to *him*, we shall perceive that *his leading doctrine* was his *Morality*—unsophisticated, unmodified, and peremptory in its demands.

Let us open the Gospels, which are the *only records* of his “sayings.” In the book of Matthew, which was the first written, the general narrative is introduced by a formal summary of the Christian doctrine, in what is usually called our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount. The place assigned to this discourse in the first authentic record—the

length and connexion of its parts—the remarkable words by which it is closed, declaring solemnly that whosoever received and *did* those specific sayings of his, should be safe and happy against all perils; and whosoever neglected them, should perish; all these circumstances clearly show, that this discourse was intended to exhibit whatever was most peculiar, essential, and imperative in his doctrine. Indeed (with the exception of miracles to substantiate his authority) almost the whole remainder of this Gospel, as well as those of Mark and Luke, consists of parables illustrating his moral precepts, and of incidents by which their repetition was occasionally called forth. This is particularly descriptive of Luke's Gospel, in which we find different parts of this discourse in Matthew, repeated at intervals, and as having been delivered upon different occasions, or under circumstances which give additional force and illustration to particular precepts. From these facts, we may reasonably infer, that our Lord was in the habit of repeating the same sayings on various occasions, and that they constituted what he frequently and emphatically termed *his* "Words," or "*the Word of God.*"

It is true, that in John's Gospel we have almost none of our Saviour's moral discourses or sayings; but the time and circumstances under which *it* was written, only tend to fortify our general observation. The Gospel of John consists of discourses and incidents wholly explanatory of his Master's personal character, in reference to his connexion with God. On that topic the other Evangelists had recorded but little, and that only incidentally. It was not a subject which had occupied much of the attention of the earliest Christians, and the reason is obvious. Men required to be first convinced of the *authority* of Christ—to have a just idea of his kingdom and its laws—and to be willing to be his disciples or subjects, before they could feel any rational interest in, or have any just conception of, his peculiar character in relation to God. For this reason, John's Gospel was not written for about fifty

years at least, after the personal ministry of his Master; and consequently, the whole first generation of Christians—the best by universal consent, that the world has since seen—knew nothing of their religion but what was written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke,* or repeated verbally by the numerous persons who had heard our Lord's personal discourses. This indeed constituted that Tradition of the Church, which was not only antecedent to the writing of the Gospels, but which was esteemed superior to them, for the writings of the Evangelists are only a history of that Tradition.

Our view respecting the pre-eminent importance of its Morality in the Christian system, is confirmed by this remarkable circumstance, that the most frequent and favourite view which is given of the Christian dispensation in the Gospels, is that of a *kingdom*. In all other systems of religion, and indeed in the popular idea of any religion generally, the chief things to be regarded are—certain dogmas of faith respecting the Divine Being, or other gods who may be adored—certain forms of worship due to him or to them—the hopes of special benefits to be received in consequence of such worship—or the fears of punishment for the neglect, whether in the present, or in a future state. All these points, for instance, are involved in the Jewish religion—they are contained in the Mahometan, and in every other system of *faith* or *religion*. But it was peculiar to Christianity to propose a set of moral principles and precepts, by which *society* should be governed, and a kingdom established “on earth,” diverse from all the kingdoms or governments which had been, or ever should be, in the world; and under which, mankind universally should acquire a degree of improvement and

* It is not meant, that the matter of John's record, is less authentic than that of the other Evangelists; but only that it differs in point of *order* and *primary* importance. We shall advert to this again in a future Chapter.

happiness, unattainable by any other means or to any similar extent.

This is the view which the Prophets gave of the *reign* of Messiah. It was in this view, that the doctrine of Christ was announced as the “commencement of the kingdom of heaven;” and in this sense, we are taught to pray to God, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done *on earth* as it is done in heaven.” The moral doctrine of Christ, containing the principles and the laws by which this kingdom was to be constituted and governed, is therefore the most distinctive and characteristic portion of Christianity. It has for its object a definite effect, to be produced on *society* and *in this life*.

To be sure, its individual disciples will be governed by its laws in their private conduct also, and the reward of such conduct will follow them to a future state; but that consideration is not, or ought not, to be their principal aim. We do not say, that the prospects of a future reward, are not held out in the Gospels as motives of action and of consolation; but there are other motives. A desire for the glory of God in the world—for his present approbation in our own minds—for the happiness of mankind—for our personal improvement and moral dignity; all these motives should have a direct and preponderating influence on the disciples of Christianity. And the advantage of this is, that it prevents that engrossing interest about the concerns of a *future state*, which frequently makes people forget or overlook the duties and the business of the present. We do not speak of the business of the world, and of the men of the world,—that has abundant motives of its *own sort*, to prompt to exertion; we speak of the business in which our Lord himself was employed, and of which he set us an example—namely, “to do the will of our Father who is in heaven.” And what *that will* is, Christ hath taught us in the “sayings, words,” or precepts of his discourse on the Mount.

The maxim of Christianity is, “make the tree good

and the fruit shall be good"—regenerate the man *in this life*—raise him up from the low and grovelling principles of this infant state of being, to the sublime principles of the kingdom of heaven, and we need have no apprehension of his future well-being.

A third argument in favour of the supreme importance of its Morality in the Christian system, is derived from the manner in which our Lord prefaces and explains his details of it. On that occasion he is very explicit in marking the distinction between *his* present doctrine, and that of former ages. In *old time*, the moral obligations of men were confined to the rules of Justice. Every man was expected to do complete justice to his neighbour, and entitled to demand strict justice in return: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." But by the doctrine of Christ, the principle of Morality is Benevolence, and its disciples are commanded to do *more* than justice to others, and to be content with *less* than justice to themselves. Our Lord frequently and formally marks this distinction in substance, though not in words; and we cannot comprehend the design and character of his Sermon on the Mount, without regarding it as an exposition of the doctrine of Benevolence, contrasted with that of Justice.

This contrast is particularly marked from the 20th verse to the end of the fifth chapter of Matthew (which may be read at leisure under this view), and the same idea pervades the whole discourse, even where it is not so distinctly expressed. For instance, the beatitudes are evidently selected to mark the contrast between the maxims and principles which usually prevail in the world, and those which should prevail in the kingdom of heaven. Contentment, meekness, mercy, peace, and a zeal for truth and righteousness, are all so many manifestations of the spirit of Benevolence, ever ready to be satisfied with *less* than justice to itself, and to give or to do *more* to others. Such virtues are opposed to ambition, to resentment, to strict claims of right, to wars, and to a selfish indifference about

whatever concerns not our own advantage. All these worldly principles are generally covered, indeed, or attempted to be covered by a cloak and a show of Justice; for none but the most depraved and vicious of mankind, can barefacedly avow even to themselves, that they are actuated by motives of injustice.

No, forsooth; but they think or say, “that they may do with their own what they please”—they may follow the bent of their own tastes and inclinations—they may gratify their passions, claim their rights, pursue their individual interests; all to the utmost verge of what public law or decency will allow. You cannot tax them with *injustice*, as they suppose; and that is all they care for. But they are mistaken, even in that supposition; because even within the limits which they have assigned themselves, people will have very different ideas of what is just and unjust, in their dealings with, and treatment of each other. Hence abundant room is left for envy, hatred, contention, and even violence, all done under colour of laws and customs, civil, military, or conventional. In all such respects, Justice (as we formerly said) is a defective rule for the conduct of such beings as men, and placed in such circumstances as they are. But the precepts and maxims of Benevolence, are a cure for all such evils.

The same character belongs to the other precepts and maxims, which occur singly in various parts of our Lord’s discourse. For instance, the precept of forgiveness, on which such emphatic stress is laid, that the forgiveness of God towards ourselves is suspended upon it. That precept clearly belongs to the class of Benevolence, and not of Justice. In the same manner, “Judge not, that ye be not judged;” and finally, that comprehensive one, “whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” This rule of placing ourselves in the position of our neighbours, is, in other words, to take a *generous* view of all subjects on which a difference of interest or feeling may arise—to dispel the illusions of *self-love* and

prejudice—and to draw us out of the circle of our own personal *rights*, that we may candidly contemplate those of others; in short, it is to be governed by benevolence, and not by selfishness.

This, we still find, is the *end* of all our Saviour's doctrine—whether we regard his precepts singly, or in combination—whether we attend to the parables by which it is illustrated—to the motives by which it is enforced—or to his own example, and the character of our heavenly Father, by which it is recommended.

But it is not only by such positive evidence, that we discover the peculiar characteristics of the Christian Morality. It is also manifested by the omission of many rules of Justice and Prudence, which no other moralist would have overlooked in any systematic arrangement. Our Lord seems to have omitted such things *on purpose*, that the peculiarity of his doctrine might appear more striking, and that the attention of his hearers might be fixed upon the *new light* which he was revealing to the world. The rules of justice and prudence had been sufficiently taught and enforced by Moses, and by other legislators and moralists. And so far, he declared that he came not “to destroy the law and the prophets,” but rather to build up and extend their doctrine; *because* he that is willing to do *more* than justice, must be so much the more willing to do *what is just*.

We have heard indeed complaints, that certain people are generous before they are just. But actions of this kind are sometimes caused by the force of circumstances, which, if sufficiently known, might excuse if not justify the deeds in question; or more frequently, people who act in this way, are influenced by a constitutional *instinct* of tenderness, rather than by a *principle* of benevolence. They are thoughtless, and do not reflect, that as every man's means of active beneficence are limited, he ought to make a proper selection of cases, and to exert himself in the first instance and preferably, in favour of those who have

claims of justice and relationship over him. If he act thus, his benevolence will not interfere with his justice; and the man whose mind is regulated by a steady *principle*, will do so.

This distinction between the instinct and the principle of benevolence, may be remarked in other instances of conduct besides this. There are persons who “will give to him that asketh,” where it happens to please their fancy, or to affect their feelings, and provided always that the boon be asked with all due humility; but the same persons will contend most obstinately for every point of right—they will yield nothing of their supposed privileges—they will suffer no wrong—they will forgive no injury. Now it is plain, that such persons do not understand the doctrine of benevolence. They are not governed by *it*, but by their caprice and their casual impressions. But after all, these instincts, however defective they may be, are still good things, and only want regulation. It may be affirmed generally of people who have such benevolent instincts, that they will not commit acts of deliberate injustice, such as over-reaching or defrauding their neighbours, and telling lies to accomplish their ends, *because* they are void of that selfishness of purpose, and that *excessive love* of money which prompt to such conduct.

Upon the whole, therefore, it still remains, that benevolence includes justice, and most distinctly and positively so, when it is regulated by reason and by principle—by a due regard to ultimate consequences, rather than to transient circumstances and emotions.

This view of the matter, we say, accounts for and justifies the apparent omission or neglect by our Saviour, of several moral precepts which otherwise required to be impressed on the minds of the people, and some of which are accordingly so urged by the Apostles, in their practical exhortations to the churches under their care. It was proper in *them*, and it is proper in *all ordinary teachers* of religion, to inculcate various precepts of justice and

prudence, especially those which, from the spirit of the age, the people may be most apt to overlook and to neglect. But the mission of Christ, as a moral Teacher, was to lead mankind to higher principles; and it was requisite that he should so express himself, that there should be no ground for misunderstanding him, or for overlooking what he meant to be of paramount importance, by viewing it in a crowd of other things, which might be more to our taste.

In contrast with this method, we may remark, that some of the precepts of Christ have indeed been expressed in substance by ancient philosophers; but then it was only incidentally, and often in company with the merest and most insignificant truisms; and at other times neutralised or obscured by opinions and maxims of an opposite character. In all such cases, there is a disposition in mankind to satisfy their conscience by an ostentatious attention to the easier rules, which they think will excuse them from the more difficult. But one characteristic of our Lord's manner is, that he was absolutely uncompromising; yet he does not conceal that there are difficulties, only he will not allow us to dispose of them in our own way—a way which has, in fact, caused his precepts to be in a great measure obscured, and even forgotten by professing Christians.

It will be our next business to remove the prejudices and to expose the futility of the excuses which have led to such neglect, and this will give us an opportunity of presenting our subject in some other points of view—of adding to the weight of its evidence, and to the light of its illustration.

Meantime allow me to repeat, that the object of our argument has been to show, that the chief thing in the Christian religion is its Morality. It forms the very substance and end of Christianity. To this all other things are subservient and subordinate; and when we speak of its morality in this manner, we do not use the term in the same sense as when it is said generally, that *practice* is the end of *speculation*, or *works* the evidence of *faith*. That

also is true. But we have said, that Christianity has a *peculiar* morality, which distinguishes it from all other systems, in *practice* as well as in *speculation*—that this morality is specially adapted to the constitution of human nature in its mature state of development, but that it has never as yet been appreciated and acted upon in the world, because the world has hitherto been in a state of infancy. The time, however, is now drawing near, when it will be appreciated and practised.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE of the prejudices which prevails against the Christian Morality as a practical system, is, that it seems by its condemnation of riches, to lead to the doctrine of a community of property; and the first disciples appear to have understood it in that way, by their attempt to establish such a community. But this view of the subject, is a mistake. The system of Benevolence necessarily assumes for its basis, a system of property. If there was no variety in the circumstances of mankind, and no property in the products of industry, there could be no room for the exercise of benevolence, either in its active or passive forms. None would have any abundance to bestow, none any wants to supply. There would be no rich persons who could display their moderation by applying only a moderate proportion of their wealth, to their own personal gratifications—no poor who could show their contentment, by submitting cheerfully to the condition which God had appointed them. There could be no beneficence—no gratitude—no opportunities of doing *more* than justice—none of being satisfied with *less*.

We do not deny, that a state of society in which the circumstances of all were alike, would have its advantages; but it is not a state fitted either to the moral or physical condition of man, in such a world as this. It would

require an ample provision of all the necessaries and comforts of life, *directly* from the hand of nature. But nature only gives to man the *raw material*—he must create all by his industry; and the first law of such a system is, that the product of a man's labour should be his own. If this law is sometimes invaded by force, or by fraud, the condition of man is so much the worse; but even his best condition must rest upon it.

The bounty of nature, and the productive power of man, is mightily aided by the *division* of labour, and by the individual charge and interest which each man has of his own labour. By such means, a vast accumulation of wealth is obtained, which could not be obtained otherwise; and the only question remains, how shall this wealth be best distributed for the general benefit?—shall it be done by arbitrary authority—by a conventional law—or by the principles of benevolence? We say, by benevolence; because every interference of authority, or of law, with the fruits of individual labour, must check the motive to its exercise, and thus diminish the general production; but the principle of voluntary benevolence has a contrary effect. It *adds* a further stimulus to our exertions. Thus, both with regard to moral and physical effects, the system of Benevolence is allied to, and rests upon that of property.

Nor is it necessary for any purpose either of benevolence or of utility, that mankind should be all on a footing of equality, in regard to riches. It is enough that they have all the necessaries and some of the comforts of life. Such a kind of generosity therefore on the part of the rich, and such contentment and patience on the part of the poor, as Christianity enjoins, would be quite sufficient to accomplish all that ought to be desired, if men would heartily embrace its doctrine. Certainly, this would amount to a vast deal more than has been hitherto done; for while we deny that the Christian precepts contemplate a *community* of goods, they undoubtedly require a far more liberal *dis-*

tribution than has ever yet taken place, or than has ever been considered *obligatory* upon them, by the great mass of persons who profess the Christian religion; ay, even of the serious and sincere part of them, for as to mere nominal Christians, we hold them out of the question.

It must be confessed, however, that there is some difficulty as to the mode of accomplishing their object, even if they were willing; and this affords a second handle or objection of which we are too ready to take advantage, so as to excuse ourselves altogether, or in a great measure, for not acting consistently with the precepts of our Master. It was not always so, however. The first disciples of Christianity were not deficient in benevolent principles; they had heard the words, and seen the actions of the Lord. *They* were fully inspired by them, as regarded his *morality*, although as Jews or Jewish proselytes, they continued under some prejudices, and in ignorance, in other respects, concerning the liberal and Catholic character of the new dispensation.

In respect of Morality, however, the early disciples, with the first and fresh zeal of persons on whom a new and brilliant light has just arisen, regarding the subject of philanthropy and benevolence; and to which light the moral instinct of man always has responded, and always will respond, before it is chilled with the calculations of fear, of self-interest, or with the difficulties it has to contend against;—with such a first and fresh zeal, I say, the primitive disciples of Christianity embraced its Morality, with all their hearts and souls, and even went the length of trying a community of goods; but it would not do. And their practical failure, probably, brought even their principle into some disrepute; or at all events, furnished an excuse to others, who were too ready to avail themselves of it, for giving up any attempt to gain the same end by more practicable means.

It may be useful here to investigate the error of the primitive Christians, and of some others on this subject,

that we may distinguish between what is only accidental, and the effect of human error, and what is essential and of divine authority in the matter. In the first place, we may remark, that the primitive Christians committed an error in thinking it practicable for such a small body of men as they were, to adopt any rule of conduct *as a society*, so completely at variance with the great mass of society with which they were surrounded. To be sure, they had the example of the Essenes (a Jewish sect) before them, and probably they were influenced by it. But the Christian Church was totally different in its constitution and object, from any such society. It was in no sense like any Corporate or *Monkish* Body. The Church was *open to all sorts of men*, without any noviciate, and without submitting to any arbitrary authority or rule; and it had for its object the regeneration of society or mankind *at large*, and not the institution of a peculiar *sect*. All sects and corporations have a private interest distinct from the public; and therefore it was imprudent for the Church to present any temptation to such private interests and passions, whereby men of improper character might be induced to join it; and whereby, even those who were so far sincere in their profession, might be tempted to mix inferior motives with their better principles. Now, the prospect of so easily getting the advantage of a public pecuniary fund, and of living without the necessity of labour, presented exactly such temptations.

There was also another error in the scheme. The gifts of all those who contributed to the public fund, were placed in the hands of the Apostles and Deacons, to be by them distributed according to the wants of the community. Now in this and in all similar regulations, there is a returning to the principles and rules of Justice, which is fatal to the very essence of Benevolence. Whenever a rich man sold his possessions, and put the funds into the hands of the Apostles or Deacons—the distribution of such funds, by these official persons or trustees, was no longer an act

of benevolence: it was a mere matter of justice, or of legal duty; and the persons supposing themselves intended for the receipt of the funds, conceived themselves entitled to *claim* their share, as a matter of *right*. Thus, we find in the book of the Acts, “that in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring among the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration;” yet the business had hitherto been under the charge of the Apostles themselves, of whose integrity and impartiality there was no room to doubt. The fact was, that the cause of the complaint arose out of the very nature of the thing. The Apostles, indeed, very good naturedly and simply ascribed it to their want of leisure to attend to the affair, and deputed it to the Deacons. But this did not remedy the evil, so that after a time the scheme was abandoned.

Another example of the same sort is to be found in the operation of the Poor Laws in England. Their design was benevolent, and in the absence of a better system they are practically useful, or under existing circumstances even necessary; but in regard to the feeling engendered by their operation, between the rich and the poor, it is quite the reverse of benevolence on the one side, or of gratitude and affection on the other. On the contrary, they have given rise to the most exasperated feelings, law-suits, and vexations, and all because the administration of the system is placed under the principle of Justice—of what *must be done* on the one side, and may be *claimed* on the other as a matter of *right*.

In both cases, the error arose from taking the operation out of the province of Benevolence, and of thereby suppressing the sentiments of generosity and of humanity—of patience, meekness, gratitude, and other moral qualities, in all which the peculiar essence of true virtue consists. God hath made the world such as it is, for the very purpose of being a theatre on which such a system should be displayed. As to how this should be done, we will speak

of that at another time; at present we are only pointing out errors and mistakes, and the objections which are grounded on them.

A second objection to our general doctrine about benevolence, is, that however beautiful it may appear in theory, mankind at large are not susceptible of being governed by it. They have never been so hitherto, and how can we expect them to be so in future? Talk as you will (such objectors will say) there is always some practical difficulty in the case; it is easy to say *if* mankind would acknowledge your principles, all would be well, but either they will not, or cannot, it matters not which; self-interest or a regard to our own immediate rights and property, has hitherto been the governing motive of human action, and it is in vain to expect it ever to be otherwise.

We reply, that self-preservation, and in so far, self-interest, is indeed the first law of nature, in point of *order*. We must secure our *existence* before we can attend even to our own *well-being*, and much less that of others. This is the condition and the law of life with all living creatures in this world. But the glory of man, above other creatures in this world, consists in his capacity of going beyond and rising above the mere consideration of animal existence: and the moral instincts and intellectual faculties by which he is urged to do this, furnish the means of making him pass from the lower to the higher development of his character. The cultivation of these higher faculties has been greater of late, than in the early ages of society, and it will be greater still in ages to come. We are not entitled, therefore, to conclude from what has been the case, to what will be.

Moreover, these common-place objections about the moral incapacity of mankind to attain specific degrees of social improvement, all refer to the laws of justice. It is perfectly true, that the passions, appetites, and interests of men are so strong and urgent, and their situation often so difficult, that the best of men will be led astray *some-*

times, and the majority *frequently*; so that all speculations about individual or social perfectibility, which rest upon the supposition that men can be made to act with perfect regularity and justice, are Utopian.

But if we rest our hopes on the system of Benevolence, the case is altered; for while it aims at a higher principle and standard of virtue than justice, it likewise makes allowance for greater defects. It contemplates the occurrence of injuries, but it provides the corrective of repentance on the one hand, and forgiveness on the other. It assumes the existence of imprudence, of misfortune, and of poverty, but provides the cure of liberality and generosity. It admits the plea of individual weakness, but it offers the aid of social and of heavenly strength. The system of Benevolence is every way suited to the character and circumstances of humanity, and therefore it can accomplish what other systems cannot.

The impracticability of justice is occasioned among other things by the *sudden* force of temptation, of passion, of circumstances, and of mistakes, against which no man can at all times guard. Benevolence counteracts and opposes these errors, by a calm, steady, and growing principle of action, which it is practicable for any man to admit and to cherish, and which will increase in power in proportion as he does so. For example, a man may be prejudiced or incensed against his neighbour, and therefore say or do, on the spur of the occasion, *what he ought not*. That is a *sudden* impression. But if he wish to do his neighbour a service, to repair or to forgive an injury, these things require coolness and premeditation. In the first case, he fails because he is *surprised*. In the second, he *succeeds* because he is *prepared*. Hence, it is more *practicable* to do *good* than to *avoid sin*; that is to say, if we are desirous of doing so. This is equally characteristic of human nature and of the system of Benevolence; and therefore, when they are brought into harmonious correspondence with each other, effects will be

produced far beyond our former experience. The victory is not to be gained by the negative qualities of justice, and by remaining on the defensive, but by the positive energies of benevolence and by active operations.

A third objection to our general doctrine, is, that some of the precepts are absolutely impracticable: such as, “give to every one that asketh”—“to him that smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn unto him the left one also”—“if any man sue thee at law for thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.” If a man, says the objector, should act upon such rules, he would be infallibly ruined or murdered on many occasions.

In reply, I would say, expressions that are obviously proverbial or metaphorical, must not be strained to the extreme of a literal interpretation. Still I admit the inference, that there would be danger of such consequences from the doctrine as the world is, or as it has been. But we must observe, that our Lord lays down these precepts and others in general, as rules by which *his kingdom* was to be governed—not the world; and when mankind in *general*, or even the *majority* of society, shall become convinced of the duty and advantage of becoming his subjects, it will be easy for every individual to act in the spirit of such precepts, or perhaps to the very letter of them—*because*, when all are actuated by the same generous and peaceful temper, nobody would give or yield more on the one hand, than he would or might get on the other, when occasion required. Society, at such a period, will be like a polite company assembled to dinner. Every one is ready to prefer another to the honours or delicacies of the table; and yet none suffer by this generosity. If there is any distinguished person in the company, he obtains voluntarily the respect due to him—if there is any humble individual, he is relieved from all degrading sense of inferiority, by the polite attention of those who are near him. Compare such a scene with a party of savages or brutes, where every one, intent on satisfying the cravings of his

animal appetite, contends for what is best or most substantial—growl and curse at each other if disappointed—or haply, fall to blows, and overturn the whole material of the feast. All this difference results from that shadow of benevolence, *politeness*, in the first case; and that root of contention, *selfishness*, in the second. But, in the first case, the whole company must be polite, or at least the *majority*, in order to shame any rude spirit into decency. The impracticability complained of, therefore, does not lie in the nature of the thing abstractly, but in the existing state of society.

What then is the duty of individual Christians in such circumstances? Surely to do all they can—to infuse their principles into society—to act upon them for *themselves*, to the utmost verge of possibility—to make the precepts of their Master the *general rule*—the necessity of modifying them, *the exception*; or their *grief*, when such necessary exceptions are numerous. It is their duty to be constantly carrying *forward* society, to a higher pitch of improvement—infusing their leaven into the lump, until the whole be leavened, and *then* the necessity for exceptions, and their grief for them, will be at an end.

In the meantime, it would totally have defeated the design and object of our Saviour's doctrine, to have allowed or even hinted at any modification of his precepts. If any given precept was found not to be practicable, owing to the state of the times, or the peculiar position of an individual, each person must adopt the necessary limitations upon his own responsibility, and at his own peril. This is allowed even under the common principles of morality. Thus the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is absolute and imperative; you cannot infer from its expression, that there can be any exception; you are not allowed to calculate before hand, and be prepared when and where you may dare to kill a fellow-creature with impunity; yet circumstances may occur in private self-defence, or in public warfare, where you are justified

in killing. This involves, however, an awful responsibility, and the justification rests on the force of unavoidable and unpremeditated circumstances. Any previous calculation or design would imply *that malice* which defines murder, under whatever cloak it may be screened. For the same reasons, while it may be true, that certain precepts of Christianity are not practicable in *certain states of society*, and in *certain individual positions*, yet that is no reason for modifying them in their *doctrinal* enunciation. The causes of such modification are of a temporary, local, and individual nature. It is the duty of Christian societies and of Christian men, to strive constantly to escape from such circumstances; this has been rendered easier, and will continue to be made still more easy, by the constant progress of society towards a more improved condition.

If we were to adopt any modification, however reasonable it might appear at any *given time*, and make of it a new general rule or precept, it would tie down society to one particular stage of its progress; and unfortunately this has been done practically, although not avowedly. Many of the precepts of Christ have been set aside as *impracticable*, and certain lower standards adopted by a sort of tacit consent. We will speak of some of these specifically, on a future occasion; but I will illustrate my general remark for the present, by one example.

Let us take the case of Slavery. In the early ages of the world, after the patriarchal system was succeeded by extensive wars and by despotism, the great majority of mankind were reduced to a state of slavery. There is no question *now, and with us*, that this was an evil of the greatest magnitude, fatal for the time to every thing that is excellent and noble in man and in society. But it was *impracticable* 1800 years ago, to have altered this state of society *on a sudden*. Christianity, in teaching the equality of all men by nature and in the sight of God, promulgated a principle capable and destined to destroy this monstrous institution; but even our Lord, all uncom-

promising as he was about his principles, did not enjoin on his disciples the immediate emancipation of their slaves. The thing was impracticable at that time, and yet we live to see it completely effected, at least in Europe. Now let us suppose, that some eminent philosophic Christian in early centuries—perhaps a Christian emperor or a pope—contemplating the spirit and tendency of the Christian religion on the subject of slavery, and at the same time the invincible obstacles opposed to the absolute emancipation of slaves, should have concerted a plan to have brought about a *compromise*, and obtained a modification of the system. Supposing such a system had obtained the sanction of law, of custom, and even the approbation of a universal public opinion in favour of what was at the time esteemed a reformation of morals, and a definitive settlement of the question,—after all, the *ultimate effect* would only have been to retard or to prevent the consummation we have lived to witness.

Such a thing precisely was done in India, by the institution of *castes*. There might not have been wanting, at the time of modelling such institutions, good reasons by which it could have been proved, that they were improvements in regard to the previous state of society, expedient under existing circumstances, and all that was practicable according to the views of human nature then entertained. But the evil was, that they arrested the progress of society, and doomed it to remain for ever in that particular stage. The experience of India for two or three thousand years, is proof of this; and there was not the least symptom of any change of the system, till the force of external circumstances, and the instructions or examples of Europeans, have begun to excite some idea of better things.

Let us compare with this, the progress of that principle once admitted and never denied among Christians, that all men were equal, and consequently should be free when circumstances would permit. This gradually pro-

duced a general feeling that it was a meritorious act, and the proper duty of Christians to approximate as nearly as possible to the fulfilment of their Master's views on the subject—to improve the condition of their slaves in point of comfort and moral character, and occasionally to manumit them as a reward of their good behaviour—or, as the notion then prevailed, as an atonement for their master's own sins. The clergy especially, were active and exemplary in this matter. The fitness and duty of it appeared more and more obvious, as the practice became more common. Political revolutions and considerations came in aid of it, under the direction of divine Providence; till at length the doctrine and efforts of the Church were in this instance crowned with complete success.

The same success would attend similar persevering efforts in favour of other precepts and doctrines of Christianity, which have been regarded as impracticable. But alas! we are like the Hindoos—we have come to a tacit compromise with the world, and with our selfish propensities—we have assumed a standard of moral and social perfectibility, far beneath the Christian standard, and we aim not beyond our own stunted mark. And there we are, and ever will remain, let us busy ourselves how much soever we may, about the means, and the forms, and the appendages of Christianity in other respects; unless we break through this supposed line of enchantment by which we are circumscribed—through this idea of moral impossibilities under which we are naturally so ready to hide our indolence and our selfishness. Where is the impossibility, for instance, of a rich man ceasing to lay up treasures on earth (as the Gospel commands), and to apply what he can well spare for the benefit of the poor, the ignorant, and the oppressed, in a measure far beyond what has been customary? What is to hinder him who hath once obtained a livelihood to be content, without overstraining his means, and engrossing his mind with plans for rising to a higher condition in the world? What

prevents the poor from being patient and resigned with his lot—remembering, that it will only last for a season, and be compensated in heaven, if nothing favourable in the course of Providence occur in this life? It is the maddening rage and thirst for riches, which has seized all ranks of society—the open and shameless worship of mammon—the love of the world and its vanities, in opposition to the love of God our heavenly Father, and the things of his kingdom.

Let us not deceive ourselves; this, and such like things, form the moral *impracticability*—the insurmountable barrier. But wherefore impracticable? Who shall say, that a man *cannot* do such things if he *would*? This is not like expecting of him, that he should never be *surprised* by temptation, nor overcome by a sudden passion—that he should never be led away by the force of *circumstances*—nor be the dupe of a false opinion or prejudice. These are indeed the *unavoidable weaknesses* of human nature. From such causes, it may be impossible for a man to be perfectly *just* and temperate at all times; and if his conscience acknowledge the authority of any ceremonial religion, he may likewise find it to be impracticable to satisfy all its *punctilios*; but none of all these things are an excuse why he *cannot* observe the Christian precepts. The truth is, either that we *will not*, or that we have overlooked and forgotten the purport and end of Christianity, in our attention to, and zeal about the subordinate parts of it. Or rather both of those causes have had an influence. Our natural inclination and passions, being opposed in the first instance to the generous principles of Christianity; it is not enough that our understanding be convinced of their abstract excellence. We must be *regenerated* in the spirit of our minds, before we can practically and habitually act in conformity to them. But this is not an easy matter. It is comparatively an easy matter for a man to adopt some new opinions in theology; and in consequence of them, to become more serious, more attentive to the forms of reli-

gion, and even subject to religious feelings, of fear, joy, or gratitude, as he may imagine himself at the time to be the object of the divine displeasure or favour. But from being covetous to become liberal—from being vain to become modest—from being irascible and censorious to become patient and indulgent—to undergo a moral regeneration of this kind, is another affair, and requires indeed that true grace of God or divine influence of which many persons who prate much, do absolutely know nothing, while they do not bring forth the requisite fruits.

“But those things which appear impossible to man, are possible with God,” and the whole tenor of our Lord’s doctrine proceeds on the ground that “a man must be born again before he can enter into the kingdom of God.” The chance and the means, however, of this moral regeneration, are greatly impeded by certain false ideas concerning the true end and purport of Christianity, and of what constitutes its most essential doctrines. We have endeavoured, in this past Part of our discussion, to elicit these doctrines, to show their superior importance, and in what respects they complete the moral education and character of man. In the Second Part of our argument, which is to follow, we will have to show, how the genuine doctrine of Christianity was corrupted and opposed by particular influences for a time, or by the substitution of other and inferior things in its place; and how, notwithstanding, it carried forward the slow, but progressive improvement of society,—in doing this, there will be farther opportunities afforded of proving and illustrating its character.

ON THE
MORAL CONSTITUTION AND HISTORY
OF
MAN.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

WE have endeavoured to give an account of the Christian Morality, to show in what respects it was distinguished from those precepts and sentiments of authority, and of justice, by which the world had been almost exclusively governed before the Christian era. We have shown that it rested on the principle of benevolence; exerting itself on the one hand, actively to do *more* than justice *to* all men; and on the other hand, *passively* to be content with less than justice *from* them. We have said, that from the character and condition of human nature, this was the system which alone could render mankind good and happy; but it required the intellectual and moral faculties of men, *collectively*, or of *society*, to be fully developed and exercised, before they were susceptible of being influenced and governed by such principles.

It was the chief object and design of Divine Providence, by means of its revelations, to instruct and educate mankind for this destiny; and the accomplishment of it was to form “the reign of God upon earth”—“the kingdom of the Divine Messiah,” which was to supersede all the

former kingdoms of the world. That this event has not taken place, however, *as yet*, is but too obvious; and, therefore, in order to show that such *delay* does not disprove our theory of the progressive improvement of the world, but rather, that it is a consequence and illustration of it, we proceed in our sketch of its moral history.

At the commencement of the Christian era, we have seen that mankind were far from having any idea or experience of those moral principles which Christianity enjoins on them, as the rule of conduct in their social relations and intercourse with each other. In the nature of things, therefore, and in accordance with the expectations of its Founder, the Christian religion could not succeed *quickly* in the conversion of the world even to its nominal authority, and much less in practically moulding the character of its professors to its benevolent and sublime spirit.

The prejudices, the habits, and the institutions of former ages, were all opposed to it; and even when its external evidence and intrinsic merit convinced men's understandings of its superiority to other systems, there remained a great number of natural passions, interests, and difficulties, in the way of its practical success. Notwithstanding all these difficulties, however, its effects upon the state of society soon came to be very considerable.

Christianity improved the world, but, unfortunately, at the same time the spirit of the world corrupted Christianity; as a brilliant colour, mixed with an opaque one, produces a shade corresponding to the proportions of the mixture; or it may be, that the light only streaks and chequers the darkness. Now, some people regarding the matter only in the dark point of view, occupy their minds solely with lamentations for the increasing degeneracy of the Church, from the first century till the Reformation of the sixteenth. Others delight to exhibit the benefits which society derived from the influence of the Church during the same period. Each are so far right and so far wrong; while their respective prejudices cause them to regard the various

characters, events, and institutions of the middle ages, in the most opposite lights.

I propose to treat these topics separately.—First, the causes which impeded the progress and influence of true Christianity, or which corrupted its nominal profession.—Second, the salutary effects which it produced upon society in spite of such impediments. In this way, I hope to keep clear of many difficulties in attempting a precise estimate of those characters and events, about which there has been so much controversy. It will suffice for our purpose, that we can so mark and define the influence of the impeding causes of error as to avoid them in future, and so to appreciate the active and successful energies of truth, as to cherish and follow them out to their destined issue. When we have done this, and looked back upon our investigation, we shall be able to distinguish a marked line of progressive improvement, although it may have appeared broken, retrograde, or obscure, at particular stages.

The first and most general cause which prevented the reception of Christianity, in some instances, and which in others obscured the perception of its true character, was the incapacity of mankind, as yet, to admit and to contemplate, in all its beauty, the idea of a benevolent Divinity and of a benevolent morality. Fear and distrust of the Deity, and fear and distrust between man and man, smothered that principle of Love upon which every thing hangs that is most excellent and beautiful in piety and in morals.

Nothing can be more clearly revealed in the teaching of Christ, than the paternal and benevolent character of God; but while the disciples durst not gainsay their Master, many of them were deficient in the *faith* of this leading and *peculiar* doctrine of the Gospel. They could not look with open face upon its glory—their weak eyes sought the dim medium of an atonement. To this they had been accustomed, and our Lord, with his wonted con-

descension, did not deny such consolation to the weaker-minded of his disciples. He authorised them to look to his death and resurrection in such a point of view. But this liberty was abused, and men stupidly fixed their regards upon the sign, instead of the thing signified.

I am aware, that, in reference to the general feelings of professed Christians, I am here entering into very delicate ground; and that such is the jealousy with which some people will watch the tendency of our doctrine in this respect, that it may be well to state at the outset what is the proposition which I mean to establish on this subject; for, unless this is understood and carried along with you, the ambiguity of some terms, which cannot be avoided, will lead to mistakes. Let it therefore be remembered, that I distinctly and unequivocally admit, that atonements, or expiations for sin, were instituted, or permitted by divine authority, under the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensations. Farther, that the death and resurrection of Christ are *occasionally* represented by him as the antitype of those former sacrifices. In this view, he says, that “he gave his life a ransom for many;” and he was pointed out by John the Baptist, as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” I have said that he does this only *occasionally*, by which it is meant, that he seldom teaches such doctrine expressly. He alludes to it only upon a few occasions, and that in rather an incidental manner. It has no place in his Sermon on the Mount, which we have asserted to be the summary, or formula of his doctrine; neither in any other formal discourse; nor is it the immediate subject of any of those beautiful parables by which he endeavoured to fix the most essential parts of his doctrine on the memory and imagination of his audience.

While the doctrine of atonement, therefore, is one of Christianity, it is none of the most prominent.

The truth is, that so far as it is connected with any *moral* sentiment—with any practical influence on the be-

liever of it—it was a Jewish doctrine, and did not require (as was formerly said of the precepts of justice) to be enforced or illustrated by the Messiah. What is the doctrine of the atonement in its *practical* bearing—that is, on the minds of those who worship or regard the Deity through such a medium? It is this:—it impresses upon the mind of the worshipper, “that he is but an unworthy creature—that he must not presume on the favour of God, for any work of righteousness which he hath done;” but must supplicate the Divine Mercy, as one who at the best hath done no more than his duty, and who, in many instances, hath failed even of that. In short, it generates humility and penitence.

But people under these impressions, and when the benevolent character of the Deity is not understood, are apt to fall into despondency. Another *practical* object of atonement, therefore, was to cheer the minds of the humble and the penitent by some express *assurance* of the Divine placability towards such worshippers. In olden time, this was given by some sensible token of the acceptance of their sacrifices and prayers. The consuming of the sacrifice by fire from heaven, was one of those tokens of which we read in the early ages of the world. But as the continuance and frequent occurrence of such tokens, in answer to every individual worshipper, would have been inconsistent with the general plan of Providence, as interfering with the fixed laws of Nature; an authorised ritual and law were framed to convey a similar assurance, generally, to a multitude. They were *assured* by the *tokens* of such an institution, that those who worshipped God, in the manner prescribed, and with the proper moral sentiments (for the encouragement of which such things were framed), would find acceptance with God. All those ceremonies were memorials of an original *assurance* given to their fathers, by the actual descent of fire from heaven, and other miracles, testifying that God would be gracious not only to *them*, but to all those who followed *their* faith and obedi-

ence, who had been the immediate appellants to heaven at the time. In this manner, authorised atonements allayed the fears of the timid penitents, and inspired their minds with a certain confidence and love of God, which they durst not otherwise have indulged.

I beg that it may be understood, that these remarks are made, not with the view of supporting any *theory* about atonements in regard to the motives and reasons of the Deity, in fixing them after any specific manner. It is solely with a view to the *moral principles* on which they are founded, as regards the sentiments of man; and I trust, in that respect, there can be no question with any candid person who is attentive to my statement. I have said, that the *practical use* of authorised atonements was to inspire humility and penitence towards God on the one hand—confidence and gratitude on the other. The reason *why* the sacrifice of animals was generally fixed upon, and *why* the death of Christ upon the cross was appointed, is a different thing, into which we do not at present inquire.

But having thus defined the practical design and use of atonements, we now remark, that the *moral* of them properly belonged to the Jewish school, and to the code of justice—not to the dispensation of Christianity, and to the code of benevolence. Even the death of Christ, considered in the view of an atonement, is to be included in this remark—that is to say, while his atonement was as much a matter of truth as the atonements under the Mosaic Law, and was every way more excellent than they were; yet to view the Christian religion under this aspect, was only a condescension to Jewish or other ancient prejudices, and because the moral sentiments of mankind were as yet only in a state of *transition* from the principles of authority and of justice, to those of benevolence. Christians of weaker minds, or of stronger prejudices, were, and are authorised to regard the death and resurrection of Christ, so as to excite in their minds

the moral sentiments we have just described, as connected with the idea of an atonement.*

But while we are allowed thus to excite our minds to virtue by the doctrine of atonement, Christianity hath provided "a more excellent way," and a way which is peculiarly *her own*. The doctrine of atonement she holds in common with Judaism and other systems; or rather, she *suffers it*, out of condescension to the fears and infirmities of people accustomed to the old ideas and prejudices—prejudices characteristic of man in his weaker and more infant moral state, whether of the world, or of his individual experience. But the doctrine which came in room of the atonement, and which we are about to speak of, is adapted to the more matured faculties and experience of human nature, and is in truth the same which we have already, but with another view, shown to be the most distinguishing and peculiar characteristic of Christianity, namely, the doctrine of a benevolent Divinity, and of a benevolent morality.

Our argument is this, that, *as* in the precepts of this morality *towards men*, it had superseded the old doctrines of authority and of justice by a more excellent rule; so, in like manner, it begets sentiments of humility and of penitence, of confidence and of love, *towards God*, more excellent in their nature than those inspired by the doctrine of atonement, and thus supersedes it also.

To understand this, we remark, that it must be obvious to every one who studies the morality of the Gospel, that it has a depth and breadth far beyond the common sentiments of men. It requires not only external regularity, but inward purity; it forbids not only evil actions, but evil passions and thoughts. It commands us not only to do good to those who do good to us, and to love those

* The *resurrection* of Christ, in this point of view, served the same purpose as the consuming of the original sacrifices by fire from heaven; *i. e.* it proved to mankind that his sacrifice had been accepted.

who love us; but to do good for evil, and to love our enemies, &c. Now, every man who habitually measures himself by this standard, and endeavours to conform to it, must be convinced how very far he is *naturally* deficient in regard to it, and how difficult it is to attain his object. He feels that before God, he is indeed a sinner, whatever he may appear before man; and that he stands in need both of mercy to pardon, and of grace to help him. And the practical *humility* and *penitence* thus excited, will be superior both in quality and in degree to that excited by the doctrine of atonements.

Certain theologians, sensible of this fact, and yet fond to bend it still to the peculiar system of atonements, have endeavoured to represent our Lord's sermon on the Mount, as a commentary on the Law (as they call it) intended to show "*its spirituality and extent*," and, consequently, our need of the atonement. Now, I would ask, What Law do they mean? Our Lord's sermon is neither a commentary on the Law of Moses, nor on the Law of Justice, but a *contrast* to *them*, as we have already shown. As to the fiction of a certain abstract law, of unbending severity, extending its authority, like the fabled *fates* of antiquity, over God himself, I demand where it is to be found? If our Lord's moral doctrine itself is to be regarded as a law, we must take it as a *whole*, and then I deny that it is characterised by any unbending severity, either as regards God or man. On the contrary, while it produces a deeper and truer sentiment of humility and penitence, so, in the like manner, the moral doctrine of Christ produces a superior *confidence* and *love* towards God, and thus supersedes the doctrine of atonement in that part of its practical and moral influence, as well as in the matter of humility and penitence.

How can any person, after reading our Lord's sermon on the Mount, imagine that God would enjoin *upon us* forgiveness and love towards our enemies—benevolence even to the evil and unthankful—and all this *without any*

atonement, if he himself were incapable of doing any such thing towards us, or were determined not to do it. Can we suppose that we are called upon to excel God himself in goodness? Far different indeed; for we are urged to such sentiments and conduct, *in order* that we may be “perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.” And to urge us further to such an imitation of the Divine perfection, it is expressly declared, that “if we are tolerant and charitable in judging others, we shall be so judged ourselves”—“if we give, it shall be given to us”—“if we forgive, we shall be forgiven.” That is, God hath expressly pledged himself by his WORD spoken by his beloved Son—his accredited Messenger to man; that, in his final judgment, he will be regulated by the same rules which he imposes upon us—namely, by those of benevolence and mercy.

This authenticated *pledge* of Heaven by its *living Word*, comes in the place of the old obscure *tokens* of atonements, and serves the purpose much better. It is more noble and honourable to both parties; for, in our intercourse with God (as it is among men), is it not more to the glory of God to confide in the word of honour, rather than to demand a *legal bond*? The moral feeling in the two cases is perfectly parallel. The one is the confidence of a son, or of a friend—the other the security of a timid slave, or of a suspicious trafficker. The one reposes upon the principle of benevolence—the other clings to the supposed security of law. The moral doctrine of Christ, therefore (if we will represent it as a law), is not severe and unbending in its character—is not the law feigned by theologians. It does not, indeed, allow any presumptuous disregard of its precepts. It goes deeper, and rises higher than the law of justice or of authority. It aims at nothing short of a divine perfection. But, at the same time, it admits of penitence; it makes allowance for ignorance and the force of circumstances; it encourages the weak by the promise of help; the fearful by the assurance of mercy; and incites to good deeds, in all times and circumstances,

by the certainty that they shall by no means lose their reward.

All this the moral doctrine of Christ effects, in a simple and straightforward manner, without ambiguity and without mystery; and thus it accomplishes all the moral purposes of atonements, in a more excellent and efficient manner. The *humility* and the *penitence* it produces, are not contaminated by a mixture of slavish fear, and perhaps despair. They are more distinct and discriminating, as being the result of the “knowledge of ourselves,” and not of belief in a *terrible* law, and an *arbitrary* appointment. The *confidence* and the *love* which this moral doctrine inspires towards the character of God, is also of a higher order than that of mere gratitude for a capricious favour. It is the result of esteem, and of knowledge—of the consciousness of congenial sentiments—of the glory and honour of being partakers of the Divine nature. It is the outgoings of a generous spirit, and not the calculations of a sordid selfishness.

This is a doctrine perfectly clear and rational, perfectly suited to the character and condition of such a being as man is, and exalting to the glory of God. The mind, therefore, which once comprehends, and is governed by it, reposes with unhesitating confidence in the result. It is not shaken by every wind of doctrine; it is not embarrassed in its prayers and devotions; it is not puzzled how to explain and justify its creed to itself, or to others—all is simple, clear, and sublime, like the character of Jesus its author; whose *life* was the express image and representation of his doctrine, and through it, of God, the Father and Fountain of all that is good.

If, therefore, we have salvation—that is to say, *moral health* to our souls—it comes through him and him alone. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ; and by no other name or doctrine than this can we be saved; by no other means can we attain that knowledge of God, and intercourse with him, by which eternal life is not only obtained, but in which it consists.

Let no professing Christian, therefore, of confused mind, and partial experience, imagine that our views derogate from the honour of Christ. They exalt him; they dwell, to be sure, rather upon his *doctrine* and his *life*, than upon his *death*; and this we affirm, is just what he himself did, in all his discourses. We do not exclude the consideration of his death, nor deny that it was an atonement; but we say, that this is a subordinate part, and partial view of Christianity, to be superseded and eclipsed by a fuller understanding of its true character and design.

CHAPTER II.

HAVING in the previous Chapter explained the substance of my views respecting the doctrine of atonement, so far as regards its moral influence and aspect, we return to our historical sketches. We may now remark, that one of the earliest, most general, and most enduring impediments to the clear understanding and cordial reception of the Christian doctrine, arose from a preference and adherence to the doctrine of atonement; not only in its legitimate form, but with various corrupt additions and mistakes.

The very idea of atonement necessarily supposes a distance between the parties; between God and his worshippers; and requires something in the shape of *priests* and *ceremonies* to conduct it. The Jewish Christians could not shake off this association of ideas, and therefore, although when they celebrated the Passover (and probably other rites and sacrifices), they “did it in remembrance of their Master” as he had taught them—that is, remembering that such things were only typical of him—still they could not conceive how they were to receive the benefit even of his atonement, without the usual tokens, ceremonies, and intercessions of the law. Hence they insisted, that unless Christians observed the law of Moses also, they could not be saved.

The Apostles, however, were instructed, and Paul especially, to oppose and to condemn this doctrine, as subversive of the very spirit of the Gospel; and their authority prevailed for the time. Perhaps the destruction of Jerusalem, and the total impossibility of practising such a system, contributed likewise to its discomfiture. But the spirit was not conquered when the form was abandoned. The very circumstance of the Apostles having been obliged in the controversy, to enlarge copiously upon the atonement of Christ, as having been perfect and sufficient without the aid of the Mosaic institutions—this circumstance led to the idea, of the atonement being absolutely the most prominent and essential part of Christianity. In proportion as this idea prevailed, it excited the desire for having the requisite adjuncts of *priests* and *ceremonies* in some shape or another.

When Christians of this character could no longer have these things from the temple or the synagogue, they resolved to have something on the same model, under Christian names and dresses. The ministers of the Church, therefore, who were at first nothing but teachers and office-bearers, were gradually invested with the character of priests and intercessors. They became a privileged order, who, by virtue of some mysterious unction, hereditary to their successors in office, were alone authorised to intermeddle with sacred things, and to convey the benefits of the atonement through certain ceremonies or ordinances. These ceremonies came to be constantly increased in number and importance. They were celebrated with pomp and splendour on some occasions, or accompanied with fastings and similar privations at other times. The importance attached to the intercessions of the priests who conducted the ceremonies, was consequently increased, and the reverence paid to such especially as were distinguished for their severe penances, was excessive. Their prayers were eagerly sought after, not only when they were alive, but after they were dead; and a saving health was attributed to their very

bones and other relics. Among these ceremonies, and in course of time, the eucharist was invested with the most imposing pomp and solemnity, and the highest virtues were ascribed to its participation; till at length it was exalted into an actual sacrifice or atonement, to be partaken of, and offered alone, by a consecrated priest and on a consecrated altar. All these things were done, indeed, still with a professed regard to Christ as the ultimate and chief object, in the same manner as the Judaising Christian had done: but the spirit and tendency of both were the same. That is to say, while the Judaising teachers and the ceremonial Christians alike professed to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, and called him Lord, Lord, they departed entirely from the spirit of his doctrine, and substituted in its room obsolete ordinances, or new traditions and commandments of men's device. We do not mean, by this remark, to say, that the whole body of such nominal Christians were on this account to be regarded as apostates from Christianity. There were among them, as there were among the Judaising Christians in the apostolic ages, many who were sincerely attached to the genuine principles of Christianity, and were only led away through prejudice and infirmity into those legal observances; but the *tendency* of them, nevertheless, was subversive of the Gospel so far as it prevailed, and in many cases it entirely cast into the shade the true Christian sentiments of piety and morality.

I have said, that the new institution of *ceremonies*, and consequently the privileges of *priests*, originated in the desire of mankind to have some *other assurance* that God would be merciful to them, than what he had provided at first by authorised atonements, and, ultimately, by the *direct* doctrine of Christ. The justness of this view will be further illustrated by a sketch of the rise and progress of some of those ceremonies, taken from the chapters of Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, which treat in each respective century on "rites and ceremonies."

“ One cause of the multiplication of rites and ceremonies in the Christian Church (cent. ii.), may be deduced from the abuse of certain titles of the sacerdotal orders among the Jews. * * * The bishops were called *chief-priests*, the elders *priests*, and the deacons *Levites*; and they claimed the same rank and station, the same rights and privileges that had been conferred with those titles upon the ministers of religion under the Mosaic dispensation. Hence the rise of *tithes*, *first fruits*, *splendid garments*, &c. In like manner, the comparison of the oblations (made by the people for the expenses of the Church) to sacrifices, produced a multitude of rites and ceremonies. * * * The same thing led to the idea of at length considering the *eucharist* as a real *sacrifice*. * * * The administration of baptism also (cent. iii.), was attended with many new ceremonies, and the remission of sins was supposed to be the immediate and happy fruits of it; and for this reason, many delayed their baptism till they thought themselves on their death-bed, that they might thus make *sure* of heaven. * * * About this time, *fasting* came to be held in high esteem, and other mortifications. * * * Also, stated times for prayers, frequently three times a-day, like the Jews at the third, sixth, and ninth hour. * * * By this time (cent. iv.) it was observed by Augustine, ‘that the yoke under which the Jews groaned, was more tolerable than that imposed upon many Christians in his day.’ * * * Among other things, festivals in honour of the martyrs were instituted, and their relics and carcasses hunted after, for charms against evil spirits. * * * But it would be tedious to recapitulate all the progress and diversity of the superstitious rites of the dark ages. Their character may be finally illustrated by considering the termination of some of them. The *eucharist* was from the beginning the most fertile subject of their superstitious inventions, till the full conviction of its being a real *sacrifice*, led to the doctrine of *transubstantiation*, and of what

they did not hesitate to call the *deified bread*, and which was literally worshipped with the most august ceremonies, and received with the most unhesitating confidence as an infallible atonement. (cent. xiii.) By this time, likewise, pilgrimages, especially at certain seasons, to the Churches of St. Paul and St. Peter at Rome, were promised a plenary remission of sins."

It is true, that the confession of sins, with sentiments of contrition and penitence, was enjoined upon all such occasions; and some good people, under all those fooleries, would be actuated by proper moral sentiments; but the mass of the people regarded every thing in its gross and literal sense, and the tendency of the system was to produce that effect, and even to contaminate the piety of the best disposed with an abject superstition. The same idea, the dissatisfaction or want of understanding in men's minds, concerning the benevolent and merciful character of God, led them to solicit the prayers and the intercession of dead saints, angels, and the Virgin Mary, &c.

Such results showed that the apprehensions of the Apostles, with regard to the tendency of the system, were well founded. The people, in consequence, lost sight of the legitimate view of the atonement, as a *token of assurance* to them that God was spontaneously merciful. They came to regard it as something which was necessary to *make him merciful*; and having once given way to this idea, the progressive addition of ceremonies and of intercessors went on, till the system was plunged into the deepest and grossest superstition. This was the natural effect of it, it being impossible to satisfy the minds of men with any measure of such inventions, when once they have abandoned the simple and clear idea of a merciful and benevolent Divinity. On the contrary, their terrors and their superstition increased, in exact proportion to the number and perplexity of their inventions. And thus, as an apostle said, "they returned to the weak and beggarly elements of the world in its rudest ages."

Now, all these evils were the consequence of Christians ceasing to form their ideas of the Divine character, and of their own duty, from the moral doctrine of Christianity. There is no safety and no peace for man, but in and through it; and, therefore, every deviation from it, every tendency to forget it, should be watched with the utmost jealousy. The history of the Church, even after the Reformation, will confirm this remark; but for the present, we return to bring forward our review of the middle ages in other respects.

We have seen the disposition of professing Christians in the early ages, to lapse into the spirit of Judaism, and at last even into superstitions as bad as those of the heathen. It was primarily owing to the prevailing sentiments of mankind still remaining unfavourable to the doctrine of the Divine Goodness. They feared, but they could not love God, because they knew him not. They were alike ignorant of the laws of Nature and of Providence.

The next delusion by which the Church was led astray, was the result of those attempts by which men, in the progressive development of their faculties, endeavoured to penetrate into the secrets of nature and of Providence, by the mere dint of their imagination. The creation of the world, the origin of evil, the existence and interference of spiritual beings, the doctrine of a general Providence, its design and results, were topics which had begun to exercise the ingenuity of philosophers, in the Oriental, the Greek, and the Jewish schools. And they thought to sound the depth of those profound subjects by their fanciful theories.

When Christianity became known to these imaginative philosophers, the place which Christ occupied in the scheme and operation of Providence, appeared a remarkable subject to them, and necessary to be accounted for, according to their respective theories. It was not the office which he sustained, and the doctrines which he

taught in this world, for the moral instruction and salvation of mankind or society, which excited their attention. Of that they had little or no idea. It was a supposed mysterious connexion which he had, and influence which he exercised over the invisible world, and the spiritual beings thereof, and who were thought to have an agency on the character and affairs of mankind. The world was supposed to have been made by some one or other of these beings who were defective in intelligence or goodness, and hence the origin of evil. Others imagined the original plan to have been marred or opposed by some envious spirit.

These teachers, who had no authority to which they could appeal, nor any miracles to authenticate their imaginary revelations, were forced to lay claim to a peculiar illumination; the fruit it might be supposed of superior intellect and genius. Hence they were called Gnostics, an imposing appellation, no doubt, in their day, but which we would call visionaries in our day. It was a favourite notion among the earliest of these Christian Gnostics, that Christ was one of those celestial æons (as they called them), of whom they supposed there was a great family in heaven, and who had assumed the *appearance* of a man, but who in reality had no substantial body, and consequently no character and feelings strictly human; and that his death on the cross, in particular, was a mere illusion. The opinions of these Gnostics are thought to be expressly alluded to and condemned by John in his gospel and epistles. But whatever we may think of this, it is clear that his doctrine is in direct contradiction to theirs, for he asserts and proves most distinctly, and more particularly than any other Evangelist, that Jesus was indeed flesh and blood as we are. The authority of John probably quashed some of the more childish and extravagant conceits of the Gnostics; but the question having been once started what Christ was in reference to his person, it was not suffered to rest, and shortly afterwards this question concerning

the person of Christ, involving the doctrine of the Trinity, entirely engrossed the attention of the Church.

The race of Gnostics, however, are easily distinguished from the succeeding race of Dialecticians, who endeavoured to define the *person* of Christ, and to fathom what they called the mysteries connected with the Arian and Trinitarian controversies, by means of logic. The Gnostics belonged to the school of the imagination, and followed or imitated the reveries of the Oriental Platonic philosophy. The Dialecticians belonged to the school of Aristotle, and of intellect, or metaphysics. The first topic, to be sure, which occupied them, namely, the controversy about the Trinity, was partly affected by the previous notions of Platonism; but in so far as it was a question of Scriptural criticism, it was an intellectual exercise, and this exercise was further pushed on, into investigations about “the innate corruption and depravity of man; his natural ability to live according to the Divine law; the nature and necessity of Divine grace, and the question of liberty and necessity.” (Mosheim, cent. v.) Of these questions we shall speak afterwards, meantime the completely fanciful character of the Gnostic philosophy may be learned from the following accounts of the opinions of two of the earliest among them, by Mosheim.

Cerinthus taught (cent. i.) “That the Creator of this world, who was also the Lawgiver of the Jews, was a Being of the greatest virtues, but subordinate to the Supreme God. Having fallen from his virtuous estate, God determined to destroy his empire, and for that purpose sent one of the ever-happy and glorious *æons*, whose name was Christ: this Christ chose for his habitation Jesus, descending upon him in the form of a dove. Jesus after this union, opposed himself with vigour to the God of the Jews (the Creator of the world), and was by his instigation seized and crucified. But when Jesus was taken captive, Christ ascended up on high, so that the man Jesus alone suffered death.”

Valentine taught (cent. ii.), “that in the *pleroma* or habitation of the Supreme Deity, *thirty* æons dwelt, of which the one-half were *male*, the other *female*. To these he added four others, *viz.* Horus or the guardian of the borders of the *pleroma*, Christ, the Holy Ghost, and Jesus. The youngest of the æons, called Sophia (wisdom), conceived an ardent desire of comprehending the nature of the Supreme Being, and by force of this propensity, brought forth a daughter called Achamoth. This lady being exiled from the *pleroma*, fell down into the rude and undigested mass of Chaos, to which she gave some arrangement, and by the help of Jesus, produced the Demiurge—the Lord and Creator of the world. This personage created all things, and also man composed of a soul and body, to which Achamoth added a *spiritual and celestial substance*.”

Such were the crude fancies by which the Gnostics attempted to explain the ways of God. Though frequently defeated, the spirit still sprang up in some new and varied form, particularly in the speculations of Manes, a Persian, who added to his conceits some of the more peculiar tenets of the Oriental philosophy, about the two eternal principles of good and evil, of light and darkness. And in different shapes and degrees, these heresies, as they were called, continued occasionally in the Church, during the whole of the middle ages.

Their chief prevalence, however, was during the three first centuries. In the fourth century, they gave place to the controversies about the Trinity, &c.

I do not mean to give, nor to assume in this place, any opinion about the merits of the various controversies to which this question gave rise; but as the practical fruits of them, *in the mode in which they were managed*, were wrath, contention, and bloodshed, we are authorised to infer that there was some great mistake about the statement, or about the importance attached to the matters at issue. Such fruits could not spring from the true doctrine and spirit of Christianity.

And here, in regard to the point of *importance*, let us fall back, for a moment, upon the Moral Doctrine of Christianity, and recollect its superior importance to every thing else. The three early Evangelists who recorded that doctrine, involving all that was known to the first generation of Christians, have scarcely preserved the traces of any of those discourses of our Lord, published by John; and which reveal all that we can learn concerning what is called the *person* of Christ. Ought we not to infer from this, that the doctrine of our Lord's *person* is inferior in point of practical use and importance to the doctrine of his *morality*? I do not mean, that, like the Atonement, it is to be superseded by the Morality; but it should, in all cases, be *preceded* by the moral doctrine. We can never be expected to comprehend the character of Christ, in its more recondite principles, till we have imbibed his moral spirit, and be renewed in his moral image. The doctrine of his person ought to be investigated with the greatest candour and humility. It is difficult, and above us, in many respects. It can only be entertained properly, by persons who have made some proficiency in his morality. It belongs to *them*, and not to the *world*. "He that hath done the will of God, shall know the doctrine." It is a thing better conveyed to a pure and experienced mind, in the words of Scripture, than it can be by logical definitions and metaphysical distinctions. In truth, such attempts are only like darkening counsel by words without knowledge. Yet it was in such a manner that the controversies on the subject *were managed*, and that, too, by persons notoriously deficient in charity, in temper, yea, even in decency and common justice. It was an intrusion of profane persons into the most holy place. And God struck them with blindness, and made them wander to weariness in the labyrinths of their own foolish disputations.

The numberless sects and diversities of opinion which arose out of the controversies concerning the *person* of

Christ, and the previous dreams of the Gnostics, constitute a prominent part of Church history, but are altogether unworthy the detailed study of any person who values his time. They were followed by a new set of disputes in the fifth and following centuries, about the moral constitution of man; but the disputants having, as yet, no idea of the true theory, and pursuing their investigations under the influence of an intolerant theology, and of a captious logic, they made no progress in the subject, or rather they involved it, as they did other topics, in greater darkness and intricacy. The decay of learning among the Romans, and the subsequent conquest of the empire by barbarians, increased the general ignorance, and sunk the contending visionaries and dialecticians into deeper and deeper absurdities. But all these absurdities they attempted to dignify with the name of orthodox doctrine; that is, each party assumed themselves to be exclusively orthodox, and it was only the *accident* of the one or the other having the majority, which decided their right to that appellation—an accident that was frequently determined by the caprice or the fortune of an emperor, a king, a bishop, or some eminent polemic. The examples and opinions of such persons, frequently changed the whole face of the subject with the ignorant multitude.

Now all this confusion, and the evils springing out of it, were consequent on a certain fundamental principle, which it never entered into the mind of any one to dispute, *viz.* “that the matters about which they were contending, were essential articles of the Christian religion, and necessary to obtain the favour of God.” They had completely forgotten that the true and essential doctrine of Christianity—namely, its moral doctrine, was entirely unconnected with their dreams and controversies; but this was above their capacity to feel and to comprehend.

In another point of view, the chief and radical cause of all these mistakes about the true nature and object of Christianity, arose from the *age* of the public mind, as

not yet having its intellectual and moral faculties matured; and this immaturity was prolonged for many centuries by the conquests of the barbarians, and by the suppression of all the arts and sciences of civilized life. In such "times of ignorance" and of social childhood, men only searched after truth by the light of an unbridled imagination, or by the wranglings of a crude and conceited logic. And even in that way, few thought for themselves. All ranged themselves under the standard of some eminent leader, and contended not so much with the enthusiasm of personal conviction, as with the blind devotion of a faction, attached merely to a name, or to a shibboleth.

I have adverted more than once, to this view of the progress of the general mind through the region of imagination and intellect, as illustrating its history. It may be useful in this stage, to dwell a little more particularly on the evidence of this doctrine displayed in the character of the middle ages.

The tribe of Gnostics, as we have said, sprung up at the very commencement of the Christian era, and their principles had prevailed before they assumed a Christian dress. At that time, the imaginative systems of philosophy—the Oriental and Platonic, were in vogue. But the controversies resulting from what was called the Arian question, arose in the fourth century. These controversies, in their progress, were modified by the increasing credit and prevalence of the Aristotelian philosophy, or the method of Aristotle's dialectic and logic in the discussion of all questions of theology and morals.

"The credit of the Platonic philosophy (says Mosheim, cent. v.) in the first centuries, did not prevent the doctrine of Aristotle from coming to light after a long struggle, and forcing its way into the Christian Church. The writings of Aristotle (particularly his *Dialectics*) were recommended to such of the youth as had a taste for logical discussions, and were fond of disputing. In this, the Christian doctors imitated the manner of the heathen

schools, and thus was the first step to that universal dominion, which the Stagirite afterwards obtained in the republic of letters. This predilection for the Aristotelian philosophy, which had commenced with some of the opponents of Origen (a great visionary, although a man of talent and genius), was greatly increased during the Arian, Eutychean, Nestorian, and Pelagian controversies. These controversies were managed, or rather drawn out, on both sides, by a perpetual recourse to subtle distinctions and captious sophisms. And no philosophy was so proper to furnish such weapons, as that of Aristotle; for that of Plato was far from being adapted to form the mind to the polemic arts."

This is a pretty clear evidence, that the state of religion was affected by the state of philosophy. In other words, that the moral sentiments of mankind depend upon the development of their mental faculties. Our historian, indeed, seems to insinuate that the prevailing disputes on theology, imposed the taste for a specific philosophy; but probably he did not reflect on the other view of the subject, and meant merely to state the fact of their connexion. At any rate, the fact is all we are bound to take upon the authority of a historian; and the subsequent progress of the public taste for the Aristotelian philosophy, sufficiently proves, that it proceeded from the condition of the existing intellectual attainments of the world.

After having been employed in the controversies about the *person* of Christ, in which it was partially blended with the Platonic philosophy, the logic of Aristotle was more exclusively applied in the investigation of what were called the Pelagian heresies. These did not admit of so much room for the exercise of the imagination, as of the reasoning powers; being versant about the moral character and history of man. I mean, that the Pelagian questions did not admit of the same room for fancy as the Arian and Gnostic. But they were still treated with an abundant mixture of fanciful conceits. The progress,

however forward, in the march of intellect beyond imagination, was obvious; so that from the Pelagian questions, the schools proceeded at a later date to the *duties* of man, and treated of them in that style of acute logical distinction and definition, which was ultimately embodied in the systems of Casuistry. Nor was it alone on topics of theology and morals, that the learned of those ages delighted to exercise their dialective powers. Questions of all sorts, many of them absurd and ludicrous, some of them even indecent, occupied their attention. At length, as if it were for want of external topics, the logic of Aristotle was turned upon itself, and a controversy about the nature of its categories (or classes into which things were divided by Aristotle) was carried on with the most violent animosity in every kingdom of Europe. One party asserted that the categories were *real things* or substances; the other asserted that they were mere *names*, adopted for the sake of convenient classification. The first sect was called Realists, and the second Nominalists, and these parties were as eager in disputing and sometimes fighting for their opinions, as were the proper theologians.

The history of the Saracens in the East, during the same period, confirms our observation respecting the intellectual state of the world in those days. They had imbibed a taste for learning, and prosecuted it more successfully than the Christians for several centuries. For, while the whole of Europe was in a state of anarchy and ignorance, the flourishing empires of the Caliphs at Bagdad and of the Moors in Spain, cultivated the arts and sciences of civilised life; and among other studies, that of the Aristotelian philosophy received a distinguished attention.

It was not, to be sure, applied to such silly disputes as among the Christians, and it was associated with the elements of that more perfect philosophy, which received the name of the *inductive* after the days of Bacon. This new philosophy, was not, indeed, formally distinguished,

and was but obscurely understood; but the collection of facts, and the practical mode of experiments, was commenced, and applied to the study of physic and of chemistry. What of the sciences of mathematics and astronomy known to the ancients, was about the same time revived, and the grand improvement in arithmetic, by using figures instead of letters was introduced. I have made these remarks about the Saracens, to show, that from the ninth to the twelfth century, and after the Platonic or imaginative philosophy had been in a great measure abandoned in the schools of Europe, in favour of the Aristotelian—the same cause, and which was independent of religious controversies (as an exciting motive), had recommended this philosophy also to the attention of a totally different people.

All this not only illustrates our doctrine about the successive development of the human faculties, but it gives a certain order and connection to the confused mass of events and controversies with which the ecclesiastical history of the middle ages is filled; and without reference to which, it is scarcely worth while to wade through it, and very difficult to preserve the recollection.

CHAPTER III.

WE have endeavoured to explain three causes which impeded the proper influence of Christianity in the world, and which corrupted its doctrines, *viz.* 1. The superstitious fears of mankind, which induced them constantly to seek for atonements to propitiate the favour of God. 2. The imaginative philosophy of the Orientals and the Greeks. 3. The dialectics of Aristotle. We now proceed to the consideration of a fourth cause; and that was, the alleged power and patronage of certain men over the destinies of others in a future state.

Christianity was the first religion in the world which

carried its views forward distinctly to a future state, and which enjoined men to receive its doctrines, and to obey its precepts under the penalty of a terrible punishment in that state. The sentiments of the Jews were obscure and controverted upon this grand point, and could not be urged *authoritatively* upon them. As for the religion of the Greeks and Romans, it had no practical regard to the sanction of futurity, although their poets indulged in some fables on the subject. Their religion was essentially of a temporal character, regulating their national festivities, customs, and laws; and frequently their military enterprises also. They feared the displeasure, or hoped the favour of their gods in the affairs of this world; but they thought nothing of the next. In Plutarch's account of their superstitions, there is some allusion, indeed, to the fears of futurity, but they did not rest upon any authority. They seem to have been the impressions of individuals, and as he wrote after the commencement of the Christian era, such impressions may have been received indirectly from the Christians.

The tenets of the Oriental Philosophy had been nearly as obscure and uninfluential in this respect, at least so far as they had reached over Europe and Western Asia. As for the mythology of distant India, that country is beyond the sphere of our remarks. Mahomet, indeed, availed himself of the powerful stimulus which a belief in futurity gives to human actions, but he only borrowed that principle, with other things, from Christianity.

I repeat, therefore, that the bold assertion and clear evidence of a future state of existence and responsibility, was still peculiar to Christianity in the first ages; and in that respect, it introduced a principle of action which was altogether new to the world, and of the most powerful character. It verified in the moral world what Archimedes boasted he could do in the natural world, "Give me a fulcrum (said he) for my machine, and I will move the earth." The doctrine of a future state was that fulcrum,

and it did change the face of the world. Since the diffusion of Christianity in Europe and Western Asia, the whole state of mankind, whether political, moral, or social, has been in a great measure modified and governed by this principle, and at one time was exclusively so.

This was far from being done, however, in the way intended by our Lord; that is to say, by its influence as a motive to obey his moral precepts, and to cherish the sentiments of liberality and benevolence. On the contrary, it was quickly perceived by the selfish nature of man, how a title to the *patronage*, or an influence over the destinies of others in a future state, would give a most tremendous power to those who claimed it, over all the passions and interests of men even in this present world. At the same time, the gross ignorance and superstition of the multitude favoured the usurpation. Those who usurped this power, indeed, did it not professedly or even consciously to themselves in the first instance. It mingled itself as bad motives frequently do with good ones, so far as to hide itself even from the conscience of the actor, and still more effectually from the view of the public, to whom the good motive alone was ostentatiously professed. In process of time, however, the bad motive became more and more palpable, and was carried to such a length for worldly purposes, that it became suspected by the people, and could not, in many instances, deceive the actors. In whatever measure, however, or in whatever combination it existed, its effects were most disastrous.

The pretences upon which this power was usurped by one class of men over the rest were twofold. First, it was supposed that those persons who held offices in the Church, were either endowed with some personal privilege of acting as intercessors with God, or that the ordinances over which they presided, and which they could alone dispense, were the only channels for obtaining the Divine favour and aid. Either way, they assumed an official power which did not belong to private Chris-

tians, and of which power the latter were the subjects. In the first age, while the Christians still remembered the doctrine of Christ, that “they should call no man master on earth”—that all were brethren, and had equal and direct access by prayer to their Heavenly Father,—none pretended, not even the Apostles, to assume the functions of *priests*; but in succeeding ages, as we have already noticed, this idea was introduced, and with it the basis of that power to which we have alluded.

A second pretence to the same power, was personal, and not official. Those persons who were eminent for piety and virtue, or for singular gifts, were supposed to have influence with God in favour of their weaker brethren. Now, the favourite idea of superiority in olden times, was attached to the practice of fasting, of penance and privations, by which the body (supposed the source of all moral evil) was mortified, and the soul purified and elevated to a sort of angelic condition. To such persons the multitude therefore paid a voluntary reverence; and they being fanatics themselves, were abundantly persuaded of their own superior holiness and influence. From such dispositions sprang that race of hermits, monks, and visionaries, who abounded in the middle ages, and shared with the official clergy the power of the spiritual empire, which both together erected on the ignorance and superstition of the people. In the earlier centuries the official and personal characters were frequently combined in the same persons; but in course of time they were often distinguished, and not unfrequently quarrelled with each other about their respective prerogatives, but they never failed to agree in fleecing and tyrannising over the people.

It would be going beyond our bounds, and is not necessary for our purpose, to sketch the progress of this spiritual usurpation up to the 16th century. It will be sufficient to contrast the precepts of the Gospel and the practice of the apostolic age on this subject, with the prevailing doctrines and practice of the Church, when the

spiritual power had arrived at its height about the 13th century. By this means we shall see how much the original doctrine of Christianity had been perverted from its true purpose.

Let us observe, first, what doctrine and practice our Lord expressly enjoined on his disciples. He taught them to cultivate humility, and to avoid all pretensions to power. "Ye know (said he) that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; but it shall not be so with you; but whosoever would be great among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister." In the same spirit he commanded them "not to lay up treasures on earth, but to distribute them,"—and to remember "that his kingdom was not of this world." The Apostles faithfully obeyed their Master in this respect, and in their turn enjoined the bishops and elders of the Church (who succeeded them in the ordinary offices of instruction and government), to beware of ambition and covetousness; for it was made known to the Apostles by the spirit of prophecy, that men should arise who would make a gain by their profession of godliness, and assume that kind of authority which they and their Master had disclaimed.

In regard to riches, it has been ingeniously argued, indeed, that the example and rule of poverty given by the Apostles, had a reference to the mean and persecuted state of the Church in the first age; but that, if Providence afterwards enriched the faithful, it was befitting them to allow their pastors to share in their prosperity. Now, this may be admitted in so far as the people might choose to do so of their own accord, and in so far as the pastors employed such voluntary gifts only in those moderate and decent comforts, which the state of society made customary. But the clergy were far from being content with this. The monks, indeed, pretended literally to imitate the poverty of our Lord and the Apostles, and some of them actually did so, or rather carried their poverty and priva-

tions to a length for which there was neither reason nor precept. Men of this spirit assumed a merit by such conduct, that was altogether preposterous, and opposed both to the examples and warnings of the Gospel. For while our Lord voluntarily submitted to poverty, he was no ascetic. He did not command fastings and mortifications of any kind; on the contrary, he shared in the comforts of life freely when they came in his way. Upon the same principle, the Apostles were even expressly instructed by the Spirit to denounce a certain race of false teachers, who should arise, "forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats," &c. Thus, neither had the clergy any excuse for their covetousness, nor the monks for their mortifications; but through these means, both of them assumed an authority and influence, even in temporal affairs, which was wholly foreign to the spirit of the Gospel.

Let us now see to what extent such usurpations were carried, both over the consciences and property of men, by the 11th and 13th centuries. The power and privileges of the Christian clergy, founded at first, as we have seen, on the fears and superstitions which existed generally even in the most cultivated period of the Roman literature, were vastly increased in those ages of barbarity and ignorance, which ensued on the fall of the Western empire. This ignorance was the root and spring of the clerical power; but it received a peculiar direction, and acquired an artificial unity, from the circumstance of being ultimately modelled into the form of a regular hierarchy. By this means, the clergy became a completely organized body, like an army under the command of a single chief, always ready to support every detached corps and member of the fraternity.

It was a natural result of the position of the Pope and his emissaries, that they should cherish the principle on which their power was founded—that was the superstition and ignorance of the people. Thus the principle gave rise to the power, and the power added force to the principle.

We do not mean to deny that the ecclesiastical power was frequently employed for good purposes, and in the absence of all other Government, was preferable to a state of anarchy; but still, as it was founded in superstition, and grew up into a despotism, it partly indicated, and partly produced a retrograde movement in society. And whatever sanative principles were during the same time fermenting in the mass of society, or by whatever good motives many of the Popes and Bishops were personally actuated in the exercise of this power, the thing itself was opposed to the progress of society, and to the design of Christianity. In this point of view, we shall select the character and actions of some of the Popes in the height of their power, as examples of our general remarks, and as pregnant evidences of the complete metamorphosis, which Christianity (or rather what was nominally esteemed such) had undergone after a lapse of ten centuries.

Hildebrand or Gregory the Seventh completed the organization of the hierarchy. He proclaimed openly, and acted upon a doctrine which had indeed for a long time inspired his predecessors, but which they dared not push to its extreme consequence—namely, “that the spiritual power was not only independent of the temporal, but superior to it; and that the Pope as its head was the Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth, and had a right to dispose of kingdoms, and to hold all kings in subjection to him.”

To us this appears a most extravagant pretension, and yet there is a certain mixture of truth in the doctrine, which might serve to cover the falsehood associated with it. It is indeed true, that the authority of God is superior to that of man, when they interfere in their exercise, and that moral or spiritual power ought to preponderate, and is destined to preponderate over the power of the sword, upon which rests the dominion of kings. But it is false that God interposes his authority between man and man, in the ordinary affairs of this life. Christ hath said, “who

hath made me a judge or a divider of inheritances, &c. over you?" And again, "render to Cesar the things which are Cesar's, and to God the things which are God's." It is false, that the moral or spiritual power is entitled to rule by the force of carnal weapons; its only legitimate weapon is persuasion, and the obedience of its subjects must be voluntary. If we attend to these distinctions, we perceive that heaven and earth are not more distant, than these opposite views of the ground on which spiritual power ought to rest; yet the mighty pretences of the Church all rested upon the sophistry by which this difference was confounded.

And to conceal the delusion the better, the Church affected an abhorrence to the use of the sword. It only delivered over its culprits, forsooth, to the secular power, to be actually punished. The Church, however, seldom wanted instruments to do its work—magistrates to enforce its decisions against individuals, or kings and subjects against one another. Its pretence of using no carnal weapons, was no better than that of a tyrant who might plead that he put no person to death himself, but merely directed the executioner to do it. And the motives by which it influenced its agents were equally base—the plunder of the victim, the gratification of their own vindictive passions, or the degrading fear of that excommunication which the more noble intelligence of the accused party taught him to despise.

It is but justice to Gregory to admit, that he was partly deluded by the miserable sophistry of the age, and believed himself right in his aggressions. He had likewise an excuse in the anarchy of the times, for using the power with which he found himself invested, to preserve some kind of order and subordination among the warlike and barbarous princes of the time. He had even in view a certain reformation of the Church, by taking the investiture of bishops out of the hands of kings and barons, who had openly made a sale of *vacant* benefices, and by

enjoining on the clergy *that* celibacy which the ascetic spirit of the times considered decent in ecclesiastics, and against which the clergy had offended, not only by marriage, but by the practices of concubinage and divorce.

But whatever were his motives, the power he assumed was tyrannical and dangerous. In the execution of his measures, he contended with and triumphed over all opposition, and rendered the Court of Rome supreme over the whole affairs, civil, ecclesiastical, and even military, of Europe; and although we have given Gregory credit for some sincerity, yet the mode in which he used his power, and especially in the case of Henry IV. Emperor of Germany, shows that there was a most lordly arrogance and insatiable ambition, mixed with or at the bottom of all his conduct; and this, in fact, has been the general spirit of the Christian priesthood in all ages. Priests may be denied to some of the ordinary passions and temptations of mankind; but the love of power is their besetting and characteristic sin.

The story of Henry, to which we refer, was this; when he found himself reduced to the necessity of yielding to the Pontiff in the matter of investitures, he crossed the Alps in winter, and came to the fortress of Conusium to solicit absolution of the Church. But the Pope, who was residing there (with Matilda the young Countess of Tuscany, a great devotee), forced the Emperor to remain in an open court at the entry of the fortress for three days, in the month of February, with his feet and head bare, and his body covered only with sackcloth. At the end of that period, and with a great deal of difficulty, he at length relented so far as to give Henry the absolution he demanded from the Church, but still forbade him to assume the title of king, to wear the ornaments of his rank, or to perform its functions, till the matter was farther considered.

Here was a Vicar of Jesus Christ for you!—of that Master who forbade his Apostles to exercise dominion like the princes of the earth, and who enjoined the for-

givenness of penitents as one of the first duties of his religion. Yet bad as this was, some of his successors carried matters even farther, and abused the power which he had consolidated, to purposes which Gregory probably did never contemplate. I refer more particularly to Innocent III.; but in order to exhibit the development of the system, and its uniform connection and dependency upon one principle, let us take a slight glance at the history of Europe during the period which intervened between the reign of those two Pontiffs.

The leading and governing events during that time, were the Crusades. These wars undertaken in the name of Christ (the Prince of Peace), to obtain possession of Palestine, and to convert infidels and heretics, were instigated and carried on entirely under the direction and authority of the Popes. By them kings were ordered to march, taxes were levied, indulgencies granted, and all manner of incitements held out to join in "the holy wars," as they were called. This undisputed right of managing the most important interests which then engaged the attention of Europe, enabled the Popes and their legates or plenipotentiaries (of which they had one or more in every country) to interfere with every thing which could be construed to have the slightest relation to the Church. It empowered them to mediate in the disputes and affairs of all who were absent on the expeditions to Palestine; for they were considered the soldiers of the Church, and under its special protection. No creditor could sue a debtor who had taken the cross. No heir could dispute the alienation of family property, although sold or mortgaged on the most ruinous terms. The Church itself became in most instances the purchaser, the mortgagee, or the donee of such estates, and in this manner accumulated immense wealth. These estates might belong to local dioceses and to monasteries, but the Popes knew when and where to tax them, and thus to make a good portion of the wealth flow into their own coffers.

Before this period, the Church had been enriched chiefly by grants of those waste lands which abounded so much, after the general depopulation of the 5th and 6th centuries. But these lands the clergy and monks had to cultivate, and that gave them some useful employment, and taught them some good habits. By the 11th century, however, such lands were mostly appropriated, and any increase of revenue from that source was cut off. The alienations and gifts of property to the Church, therefore, during the Crusades, brought along with them no redeeming habits, and were consequently the source of a luxury and profligacy among the clergy, formerly unknown.

The height to which these corruptions were at length carried, and the glaring inconsistencies of the Church, in having become a temporal and military despotism, appeared at length so striking, as to awaken the attention of many, and gave rise to numerous sects who impugned the authority of the Roman Hierarchy, and even denounced it as the Antichrist foretold by the spirit of prophecy. Such attacks on the character of the Church, joined to the ultimate failure and disasters of the Crusades, would have endangered its authority, if the Popes had not, with their usual policy, contrived to prop it up by a new device. The Crusades themselves furnished them with materials for this purpose. During the course of them (that was for about two centuries), this idea was established and incorporated with the public law of Europe, and under the sanction of the Church, *viz.*—that all those persons who differed in faith from dogmas of the Church, or questioned her authority, whether infidels or heretics, might be lawfully attacked and exterminated. The Popes availed themselves of this idea to turn the tide of the Crusades against the heretical sects above mentioned, and to apply the same means and authority to extirpate them, as had been used against the Saracens. They even went farther, and erected a new institution to support their tottering

power, *viz.* the Inquisition; and this may be said to have carried the usurpations of the spiritual despotism to the very acme of effrontery and wickedness.

CHAPTER IV.

WE have said, that the principal movements in Europe, between the reign of Gregory VII. and Innocent III. were the Crusades. There was another series of moving causes, however, less striking indeed in external appearance, but having a considerable influence internally on the condition and character of the Church, even before the time of Gregory; but which underwent a peculiar modification in the 12th and 13th centuries. I speak of the monastic orders and ascetic tribes, of whose history it is necessary to take some notice, in order to understand those schemes of Innocent which completed the usurpations of the Church.

The influence of the monks and ascetics, as formerly observed, was not official but personal—the result of popular opinion respecting their extraordinary piety. This reputation was gained almost entirely by their penances and mortifications—a species of virtue that was considered of the highest description in those days; partly because such things were considered in the light of atonements, and partly from the opinion, that all moral evil was inherent in *matter*, and therefore to be subdued by bodily mortifications. Their mode of doing this, was by fastings, seclusion, and voluntary poverty; while they devoted their time to prayer and contemplation. In prosecuting this system, they proceeded to the most ridiculous lengths; but the more extravagant their penances were, they gained the greater credit with the superstitious multitude, who were persuaded that such *saints* must doubtless have great influence as intercessors with heaven.

When their number had greatly increased in any particular age or country, they formed themselves into communities, and lived or professed to live under specific rules; one of which always was, that of poverty. Such, however, was the devotion of the people to them, that these communities generally acquired wealth, and lost sight of their original vows of poverty. But new orders or distinguished individuals were always arising; who, by professing stricter rules, succeeded for the time to the reputation of the original hermits.

In general, the influence of the monastic orders, and of the ascetic tribes, was the same with that of the priests. But in process of time, when the bishops and the established orders, and above all, when the Court of Rome became pampered with wealth and sunk into luxury, this raised the enmity of those monks who adhered to the original practice of mortifications and abstraction from the world. In consequence, many of those ascetics began, during the 12th and 13th centuries, to declaim against the corruption of the Church, although they did not call in question her doctrine, or the primary grounds of her authority; but this led others by degrees to dispute even her dogmas and original rights. At this period, therefore, the *personal* authority of such teachers, resting on their character for piety as that of the ancient hermits did, began to be opposed to the *official* dogmas and authority of the Church and of the clergy.

It was to quash this growing spirit that the Inquisition was established; and fortunately for the Popes, they got certain new orders of monks to enter into their views and co-operate with them. These were the Franciscans and Dominicans. All the former established orders had departed from their original rule of poverty; and wallowing in wealth and luxury, were liable to the same accusations of profligacy with the secular clergy. These two orders, and others of minor consequence, adopted not only the rule of personal poverty, but of absolute *mendicity*. The

older monks easily evaded the rules of poverty, by accepting property for the benefit of their communities, although they held no personal right over it; but these new orders disclaimed all rights to property whatever, and subsisted entirely by begging.

The silly multitude, always easily taken in by pretences to *ascetic morality*, immediately bestowed their highest regard upon the mendicants; and these Dominicans and Franciscans recommended themselves to the special goodwill of the Pontiffs, by an active zeal for the orthodoxy and rights of the Church, in opposition to that class of ascetics and heretics who denied them. And such was the devotion of the people to these mendicants, that they preferred them to the official clergy or priests, in being confessed and absolved by them. Many went even the length of believing, that if they but died in the habit of a Franciscan or Dominican, they had a sure passport to heaven.

The official clergy were a good deal offended at this, but the Pope who saw his interest in supporting them, formally granted the mendicant monks the right of preaching, of confessing, and of absolving; and to make some amends for their severe rule of poverty, he was very liberal in giving them *indulgences* to dispose of, by which means they acquired a source of revenue which was neither personal nor corporate. At the long run, they got even their rule of poverty modified by the Popes in other respects, and came to be the most opulent and powerful orders of all the monastic tribes, till the rise of the Jesuits. But our business is not to follow out their history. We wished only to point out the source of their intimate connection with the Roman Pontiff, and how it came about that the Dominican Friars were specially employed as the agents of the Inquisition.

This brings us forward to the age of Innocent III. We behold the Pope now (in the thirteenth century) strengthened by the habits and aggressions of the spiritual power

since the time of Gregory VII.; lording it over the kings of the earth, setting up some, and deposing others at his pleasure; we see him the absolute head of the Church, not merely in point of ecclesiastical authority, but in respect of its temporal possessions. He had assumed directly into his own hands the appointment to all the most considerable benefices of Europe—keeping them vacant frequently for a time, and appropriating the revenues to his own use—taxing them in other instances, and in all cases filling them with his own creatures. We behold him having formed an alliance with the new orders of mendicant monks, making them his tools, and even contriving through means of their traffic in indulgences and their confiscations of heretical property, to swell his coffers still more extravagantly.

And this man, setting himself above all that is called god among men (that is, in the language of Scripture, persons in authority), “sitting in the temple of God, and showing himself to be God” (or at least his vicar on earth)—this was the alleged representative of the meek and lowly Jesus, and the supposed successor of Peter the fisherman—this was the expounder of that Gospel which forbade to its disciples the love of riches or of power, and enjoined the practice of mercy and benevolence. Ay, this was he in all human pomp and glory! But we know how the Scriptures characterise him, and how those things which sometimes appear fair and imposing to man, may be an abomination to God.

Nor must we separate him from the system; for as the head was corrupt, so were all the members. The kings and bishops, indeed, felt his exactions; and began, shortly after this period, to treat the supreme Pontiff as a despot, and to rebel against his authority: but in the mean time, like all other persons living under a despotism, they partook of its spirit and corruption, and acted over again in their smaller spheres, the same system of exaction and tyranny upon the unhappy people. The his-

torians of all parties, even the Roman Catholics themselves, are loud in their complaints of the universal corruption which prevailed for two centuries previous to the Reformation, among all classes of mankind, and especially among churchmen. In the emphatic language of the Prophet—"the whole head was sick, the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, there was nothing but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores."

But as specific facts make a more lasting impression than general descriptions, we shall conclude this historical sketch with some of Innocent's particular transactions. In England the Archbishopric of Canterbury having fallen vacant, the convent proceeded regularly to the election of John de Grey to that high dignity; and this election was confirmed, as it required to be, by the authority of King John. Innocent, however, had laid out the place in his own mind for one Stephen Langton, a Roman Cardinal whom he consecrated, and sent over with a letter to John, requesting him in the first instance in soothing enough terms to complete Langton's investiture. The king refused, and after some ineffectual negotiation to compromise the matter, the Pontiff laid the kingdom under *interdict*. The effect of this would have been, to put an immediate stop to divine service, to shut up the churches, to suspend the administration of the sacraments, and even the burial of the dead in consecrated places, and with the accustomed rites. But this interdict was partially evaded by one order of the monks and some of the bishops, who had the courage to protest against the injustice of the Pope's proceedings. Innocent thus finding his interdict insufficient to reduce the king to obedience, proceeded next to excommunicate him personally, and absolve his subjects from their allegiance; and finally assembling a council of cardinals and prelates, he formally deposed John, and declared the throne of England vacant. At the same time he wrote to Philip Augustus, king of France, authorising

and requesting him to execute this sentence, and to unite the kingdom of England for ever to his dominions. All the other Christian princes were likewise exhorted to aid Philip in this enterprise; and the same indulgences were promised to those who should take up arms in the cause, that were granted to others employed against the infidels in Palestine.

The French monarch entering readily into the views of the Roman Pontiff, made immense preparations for the purpose: while John, terrified at what might be the consequences, listened to an insidious proposal of Pandulph, the Pope's legate; and was induced to solicit the protection of Innocent, upon the condition of rendering homage to him for his kingdom, and receiving it back again for a certain tribute for ever, to the See of Rome, as the superior of the kingdom. This shameful ceremony, including his taking oaths as a vassal to his liege lord, was performed publicly at Dover; and while John in doing homage presented a sum of money to the Pope's representative, the proud legate trampled it under his feet, as a mark of the king's dependance. And not even satisfied with this mortifying insult, Pandulph kept the crown and sceptre five whole days, and then restored them as a special favour from the Roman See. Such was a sample of this Pope's pretensions and conduct, of which history records several similar instances.

But the grand exploit of Innocent, was the erection of the Inquisition. I shall give a short account of the cause and origin of it from a French author, whose partialities are more in favour of Catholicism than of Protestant opinions, and therefore not liable to any suspicion of exaggeration. "The attention of the popes about this time (says our author) began to be directed towards a host of sects, who, under the name of Cathari (Puritans), Apostolicals, Waldenses, and Albigenses, pretended to restore the Church to its primitive purity—who preached up the contempt of riches and grandeur, and who wished to

make the ministers of religion simple teachers and servants of the altar. Former popes endeavoured to suppress these rising opinions, merely by means of the ancient discipline of the Church; but finding these ineffectual, Innocent III. formed the monstrous idea of preaching a crusade against the heretics, in the same manner as had been done against the infidels. The south of France was the principal seat of these new opinions; it was there where we behold the ravages of a war, the most ferocious and detestable, with which the pages of history were ever ensanguined. Few events have ever had consequences so disastrous, so multiplied, and so lasting as these crusades; so opposed to the true spirit of religion. This war of extermination lasted twenty-one years, with very short intervals. The most extravagant fanaticism, the most brutal barbarity, the thirst of pillage united to that of conquest, laid these beautiful countries waste, and destroyed an entire generation, without destroying the heresies against which such measures were directed.

“ This right of punishing heresy which the popes thus arrogated to themselves, led to the right of searching it out, and from that again arose the *Inquisition*. Innocent III. created this bloody tribunal at the close of the Albigensian war. This Pope made the Christian princes servants and executioners to the Inquisition, enjoining them to take up the sword for the Church whenever she required it, under pain of excommunication, of deposition, and even of civil infamy. The duty of inquisitors was at first imposed on the bishops with certain assistants, and with the most unlimited powers to penetrate into the secrets of families, and even of people’s private thoughts—a more odious and debasing slavery than the most ingenious despotism had ever contrived. But even this was not enough. The bishops and secular priests having local connections and sympathies with the people, might temper the exercise of their authority with mercy. It was found necessary to have the ministers of the In-

quisition entirely dependant on the Court of Rome, and absolutely devoted to its interests. They must be persons at leisure, and not distracted with other affairs. They must be detached from parents, friends, and connexions—in short, having a regard for nobody whatever, either in respect of general considerations or particular relationship, They must be harsh and inflexible, without pity or compassion—the fit tools of a tribunal, the most rigorous and severe the world ever heard of. The new order of mendicant friars founded by St. Dominic, united all the requisite qualities, and from them the inquisitors were accordingly chosen.”

Such was the state of the Church in the 13th century. It had indeed become a “kingdom,” and nominally under the authority of Christ; but alas! how different from the reign of those moral principles and precepts, which he declared to be the rules of *his* kingdom, and the distinctive character of *his* subjects. And not different only, but diametrically opposite. Yet this strange metamorphosis—this hideous delusion, all sprang from that original error to which we formerly adverted, namely—that God was not benevolent either in his own character or in the rules of morality enjoined on man; but that he still required to be propitiated by *some sort* of penances, sacrifices, or intercessions, and to be served through the medium of priests. Thus the ways of God were involved in a mystery, impenetrable by the vulgar, and only to be interpreted as occasion required, by a class of initiated and professional expounders, or rather deputies with discretionary authority!

The kingdom founded upon these principles, had the form, but was destitute of the power of godliness. Its functionaries made a worldly gain, and claimed a worldly power in the name of godliness. They exercised all manner of impostures, intolerance, and oppression, in its name. They were the wolves in sheep’s clothing who devoured the flock. They were tyrants who governed

by means of *fear* and *force*, utterly ignorant of the spirit of that Master whom they professed to serve, and of the principles of that moral reign which he came to establish on the earth. And all this because they had abandoned his instructions, and given themselves to fables of their own invention, to disputes of their own raising, to contrivances of their own imagination, under the pretence of effecting ends which were often useless, or where they aimed at what was useful, means had already been provided and pointed out by their Master far more efficacious than those of their stupid contrivance. In short, this kingdom began and ended with calling other men masters than Christ; and a pretty master they got at length, as we have seen. It commenced by casting a mist over the plain doctrines of Christ's personal teaching, and it ended by involving religion in utter darkness and contradiction.

CHAPTER V.

WE have seen the dark side of the picture; the mischievous effects produced by antiquated doctrines, by a false philosophy, by a spurious and ascetic morality, and by the ambition and covetousness of the priesthood—we have seen all these and similar elements of worldly prejudice and policy, mixing with and obscuring the pure elements of Christianity. We are now to contemplate the bright side of the subject, on which we shall behold those pure elements—the peculiar doctrines of our blessed Master—working silently, but effectually and perseveringly, in the improvement of the world, *in spite* of all hostile influences. The principles we speak of, are those of his moral doctrine; and I request my reader to observe how exactly it happened in proportion as they were attended to, that Christianity did good to the world; and how exactly evil followed, precisely in proportion as the antiquated ideas, vain conceits, disputed dogmas, and

priestly or monkish inventions, were substituted in its stead. Let us judge of these opposite systems, therefore, as our Lord hath commanded us, "by their fruits;" and by so doing, the meanest capacity may learn the truth of our doctrine, regarding the paramount importance and value of its morality, in the system of Christianity.

The first thing which we shall consider, in this view, is the doctrine of the perfect equality of all men, in the sight of God, as members of one family, of which he is the Parent and of which all are brethren. This doctrine pervades all the discourses of Christ. It is upon this ground that he addresses the language of consolation to the slaves, to the poor, to the mourner; as being in the sight of God equally precious, and even more so, than the rich and prosperous, *because* the former having received their evil things and the latter their good things "in this world," it is meet and just that there should be "a future compensation." It is on the ground of this natural equality and common relation to God, that we are commanded to do good to all, to love all, and "to do to every man as we would that they should do unto us." Abstractly, these are indeed self-evident principles, which no man (at least in the present day) can contradict; but the ordinary course of events, by which some men find themselves born to wealth and privileges, and by which others acquire them above their fellows—these accidents obliterate the sentiments of nature and of common sense, and beget a habit, in people of rank and fortune, of thinking and acting as if they were a different race of beings from their fellow-men. And more especially if, from the favour of political institutions, the privileges and property of the favoured class become hereditary from one generation to another. *Then* they acquire the habit of regarding themselves practically and completely as a different race, having no common ties and obligations of humanity towards their unfortunate brethren.

Such was the case among the nations of antiquity be-

fore the Christian era. Among the Greeks and Romans by far the greater part of the people were in a state of slavery, and belonged directly to masters who had even the power of life and death over them. No law, no institution, no principle of public morality, no religious opinion protected the slave. The right of the master had no limits but those of his own interest or caprice.

The masters were not even restrained by the motive of fear or prudence, for they went about constantly armed, and in public places; inhabiting the cities, while the greatest number of the slaves were employed in agriculture, and were destitute of arms. This was carried to such a length, that the young Lacedemonians even amused themselves occasionally in hunting their helots or slaves, as we do wild beasts. And as to the free citizens themselves, they were far from enjoying the liberty and equality of modern times. They had certain magistrates, indeed, such as the Tribunes, to protect their rights, and in some instances to control the patricians; but still in the common routine of affairs, the patricians occupied all the important offices of state—the senate, the priesthood, the auguries, the military commands. In fact, and in their common habits, the plebians were merely a sort of domestic retainers in the families of the patricians. After the usage of the times, they constituted their clients, and in that capacity they were bound to attend their chief (something like the highland clans of old time) in his movements out of doors, or in his antichambers within. These clients, indeed, had the privilege of choosing their master, and he was obliged by law to protect them from all bad treatment on the part of other patricians; but still they were a degraded race. They were not allowed by custom to exercise mechanic trades, in which the slaves alone were employed; and thus they were prevented from acquiring property, as the lower classes may do in modern times, and thereby have a chance to rise to an equality with their superiors. Besides this, the whole nations of

the Greeks or Romans (whatever might be their privileges or distinctions among themselves) constituted, after all, but a small portion of that population over which they reigned; and they considered all other nations, though their subjects, as natural enemies and *barbarians*. In that respect, they themselves were the enemies of the human race; and the feeling of this truth, at last made the tributary and surrounding nations rise up and destroy their empire.

Now in all these respects, wherever the Christian religion prevailed, it produced a most favourable improvement in the state of society. It mitigated the hardship of the slave, and prepared the way for his emancipation. It proclaimed the doctrine, that even he had moral and natural rights, which might not be despised with impunity by its disciples. And although the general condition of society, especially during the anarchy which ensued on the conquests of the Goths and Vandals, would not allow of their complete emancipation for a time; yet laws were made for the protection of slaves, and in some measure to define their rights. In the middle ages, the slave was generally attached to the soil, and thus the property of the master, in the person of the slave, was only indirect. At the same time, the law attached a value to his life, and even to the members of his body, as was the custom of the times. His eyes, his ears, and every distinct limb, had its determined price; so that if the master killed or maimed a slave, he was obliged to indemnify his children or relations; and this practice of itself, besides other evidence, assumes that the slaves could have property independent of their masters. Thus, religion interfered to protect them from arbitrary abuse, and to remind mankind that they were all brothers, and reciprocally bound by the laws of morality and in the sight of God. It was this idea which prepared the way for that general emancipation which took place as soon as Europe recovered from its condition of anarchy. Of such general emanci-

pation, there was no similar example in times of antiquity. At the same time, when Europe did thus recover itself, its inhabitants no longer found their enterprise shackled, or any class debarred from activity in prosecuting the arts of industry, on account of such arts being regarded as *the work of slaves*. The arts of peace and industry were accounted honourable; and by affording employment, and creating intercourse between all classes of society, they tended to civilise the entire body. The new-born nations also, no longer regarded themselves each as a chosen people to whom all others were to be tributary, but as a confederation of states, having equal political and social rights in their general relations, however the ambition of particular princes might aim at superiority over one another. And thus the principles of society were placed upon a *new and more secure basis*, both internally and externally, being no longer exposed to the insurrections of abused slaves, nor to the hostility of surrounding barbarians.

Such salutary effects upon the internal fabric of society and of international laws or customs, are the most important results of freedom; but even in its more common acceptance, as regards the relative condition of the people and their rulers, the influence of Christianity has been favourable to the cause of liberty. In this respect, while it does not interfere directly with politics, and with the questions of justice dependent on them, it does more than justice, in an indirect manner. There are two sorts of people generally engaged in the cause of liberty. The one consists of those who are very jealous of their own rights, and very keen in demanding justice in that respect for themselves; but when they get into power, they are negligent of, or even opposed to the rights of others. It is only liberty for themselves that such persons want; but they care little about that of others. They may nevertheless be sometimes the instruments of good. Yet they also do evil. They degenerate into factions, distract the commonwealth

and give rise to civil wars, or to the rancour of party spirit. There is another class among the lovers and champions of freedom, who feel little and care little for themselves, but whose generous breasts are fired with indignation at the injustice done to others—at the oppression of the poor, and the suppression of knowledge and liberal sentiments. These are the men who will sacrifice themselves for the public good, and who rise above all selfish views in their zeal for promoting it. Now, this noble sentiment, which all men admire, and admit to be the only true public spirit, springs from the enthusiastic contemplation of those primary principles which Christianity teaches and enjoins—viz. the equality, or rather the brotherhood of mankind, in regard to each other and in the sight of God; and from this again, spring the obligations of equal rights, of equal justice, and of universal philanthropy. The Greeks and Romans had their patriots, but the genuine sort of them were few and far between; and after all, their public spirit only extended to their own country, and was exerted for its preponderance over others. A zeal for universal liberty is peculiar to modern Europe, and arose out of the same enlarged views, which led to the social emancipation and freedom of its own citizens; and these were of Christian origin.

Connected with the general principle of freedom, we may also notice the improvement of domestic life through the influence of Christianity; in consequence of the female sex being raised to a more respectable rank in the scale of society. In the nations of antiquity women were regarded almost as a sort of domestic slaves, and were seldom treated as companions and friends, either in public or in private. The exceptions to this were few. There were no such things as mixed parties, in which the women took a share in the entertainment and conversation, and were treated with any deference. They were considered only in the light of instruments to the man's domestic convenience or personal pleasure, and even the caprice of

uncontrolled nature was provided for by the practice of polygamy, or by the easy means of divorce. It is remarkable that this was almost the only regulation of civil society, with which our Lord interfered by direct and positive precept. He forbade divorces, except in cases of adultery, and rested this injunction upon the general ground "that in the beginning, and from the obvious constitution of nature, the sexes were intended to live in pairs." In his view, this was a matter of far greater importance than a mere civil regulation. It involved that principle of domestic society, which we have formerly observed to be the prototype and preparative of the benevolent affections, and which depends essentially upon the perfect equality of all its members, in their views of each other. The ancients, by transgressing the law of nature, contaminated this fine source of moral sentiment and of happiness; and they did so, not only with regard to their wives, but also with their children; for the Roman law gave fathers an absolute power, even to the extent of life and death, over their children.

We may be satisfied indeed, that natural affection would modify the exercise of this terrible power, in many instances; but the very existence of such a law, proves the principle of domestic discipline and society to have been of a stern and despotic character. And whatever might be its supposed advantages otherwise, it must have been destitute of that perfect confidence and affection which constitutes the charm of domestic society, either in a state of unsophisticated nature, or of a well-regulated Christian family. There are cases, indeed, in which the perverse tempers of his family must compel a man of the mildest disposition, to maintain an authority which appears inconsistent with that equality which we praise; but in an enlightened and improved state of society, such cases will be exceptions to the general rule, and only the misfortune of a few ill-matched pairs. In point of fact, wherever the general rule and state of domestic society is not founded upon the prin-

ciples of equality and benevolence, the condition of public society has been found morally bad; and this is always the condition of heathen countries, comparatively with Christian.

Nor is the benefit which general society has received from the introduction of the female sex into its bosom, confined to the propagation of domestic feeling, although that is of vast importance, as forming a million nurseries of the kind affections. The respect which Christianity enjoins otherwise, for the purity of the sexual sentiment, introduced that civility and decorum which regulates the common conversational intercourse of the sexes in modern times, and which is felt to be of so much utility to the general politeness of society. Another benefit was derived from the introduction of the female character within the social pale; I refer to the exercise of all those mild, patient, and humane virtues, so peculiar to Christianity, and which has enabled womankind, in many instances, silently and unostentatiously to expand their beneficent influence over the private scenes of life—ministering to the wretched, to the sick, and to the dying, where the more public labours and habits of man prevent, or disincline him from attending to such duties. In many respects, therefore, Christianity has been the friend of woman, and woman the friend of Christianity; and from their moral influence so combined, society at large has derived very great advantages.

Such have been the benefits derived from the Christian doctrines of freedom and equality—of all mankind constituting one family, and having the same rights and capacities, as regards difference of sex, of condition, and of country.



CHAPTER VI.

THE second good moral effect of Christianity, which we are to consider in reference to our plan, was the introduction generally of all the humane and benevolent virtues, into the notice and approbation of the world; and the practice of them, to an extent far beyond any thing that had been customary in former ages, or is even yet in countries to which the knowledge of the Christian religion never extended. The testimony of early writers, to the introduction of these virtues by the Christians, is clear; and the difference of modern European manners, from those of Greece and Rome on this subject, abundantly striking. The apologists for Christianity, in the second and third centuries, constantly affirmed in the face of their enemies (who could not contradict them), the general good character of the primitive Christians, and their benevolence in particular. Thus, Justin Martyr and others, represent the change which was produced by the conversion of individual Gentiles;—

“From being impure they had become temperate; from being wedded to the world and its passions, they had become benevolent, and ready to relieve the wants of their brethren and of strangers also; for they considered themselves united to all human beings. * * * “Would we thus live pure and innocent, unless we believe that God governs the world? It is because we have this belief, that we lead so pure and benevolent lives. * * * What religion can be truer than this, rendering men meek, modest, chaste, charitable, kind, and helpful to all, as of beings most nearly related to us? Is there not amongst us sincere faith, first towards God, and then towards man, as joined in the natural bands of society. * * * Under the reign of the emperor Gallus, a pestilence broke out in the empire, which spread its contagion so widely, that there was scarcely a

family that was not called to mourn over the loss of one or more of their members. Among the Gentiles, when any of them fell sick, they were instantly thrust out, shunned by their nearest relations, and left to expire or to be exposed on the highways—their friends taking no care of them whether dead or alive. But during this melancholy season, many of the Christians, out of the overflowing abundance of their kindness and charity, regardless of their own health and without dread, visited the sick and ministered to them. In discharging these humane duties, they had the satisfaction to see numbers restored to health, who might otherwise have sunk under disease. * * * And such has been our practice, from the introduction of our religion, to do good, in various ways, and especially to all the brethren, supplying the necessities of life to many, and relieving the poverty of those who were in want.”*

That in these representations there is no exaggeration (says the historian from whom I have quoted them), is rendered evident, by their being fully confirmed by writers who would gladly have detected their falsehood, and exhibited the Christians whom they hated and persecuted, in the most odious colours. This was particularly the case with the emperor Julian (the Apostate), who had taken up the utmost antipathy to Christianity; yet even from him was extorted with reluctance, the most positive testimony to the same facts. Writing of the Galileans (as he chooses to style them, because Jesus was of Galilee), that by their charity they excited admiration in the minds of men, he uses this as an argument with the heathen priests, “that they should promote the interests of paganism, by the same methods which had promoted

* Cook’s View of Christianity, Vol. III. p. 215. I have in some other places expressed or condensed some of his remarks on similar topics without a distinct quotation, and sometimes without being conscious of it while writing. His more detailed statements are well worthy of more particular study.

(what he calls) the wicked religion of the Christians—that was by bounty to strangers, by burying the dead, and by holiness of life:” for, saith he, “the poor having no care taken of them, the wicked Galileans know very well how to take advantage of this neglect, for they give themselves up to humanity and charity; and by these plausible and insinuating ways, strengthen and increase their pernicious party.” It is a shame, he adds, “when the Jews suffer none of their people to beg, and when the impious Galileans relieve, not only their own poor, but those of our party, *we should be wanting in so necessary a duty.*”

Nor was it only by individual and temporary acts of charity, that the Christians gave an impulse to the virtues of humanity. They first set on foot hospitals, and such like permanent institutions, for the benefit of the sick and unfortunate. And here it is fit that we should pay a tribute to the memory of an illustrious Roman lady, who set an example in building and endowing the first hospital in the world. Her name was Fabiola, a lady of honourable birth and considerable fortune, who having sold her estate, dedicated it to such purposes. In it she maintained and cured the sick, the miserable, and the infirm; hundreds of diseased and distempered patients being brought together, which it was her unceasing occupation to attend and to relieve. In all these instances, we see the first germ of that sentiment of *philanthropy*, to which the ancient world was a stranger; but which through succeeding ages softened the character and ameliorated the condition of mankind, in all the countries of Christendom—redeeming in some degree and opposing the influence of those demoralising principles to which we have formerly adverted.

It will not be necessary for our purpose to trace the operation of this philanthropic spirit through the whole of the dark ages. Its influence is indisputable, from the various charitable institutions which took their rise in those times, and from the immense wealth bestowed on

the clergy and the monks, who were considered the trustees of the poor, and who really applied a great deal of it to the purposes of charity, although they abused other portions of it, in ministering to their own gratification. The good intentions with which a thing is done, and the degree of good it actually accomplishes, are not to be underrated on account of the abuse which bad men may make of it; and this remark equally applies to the recipients and to the trustees of charity. The abuses are temporary and accidental, that is to say, they are the result of extrinsic causes which may be removed; the good principle is uniform and permanent. It will survive and flourish with increased vigour and effect, when experience and the improved character of mankind are capable of acting more entirely by its influence. In the meantime, we behold, in the esteem which is now bestowed on benevolent principles and plans—in the regard which is professed for the interests of the poor and unfortunate—in the innumerable institutions appointed for such purposes: in all these and similar things, we behold the inextinguishable spirit of Christianity maintaining its ground, and preparing the means of farther triumph.



A third effect of the Christian morality upon the state of society, has been its peaceful tendency. The Gospel is emphatically the doctrine of peace. The precepts by which it forbids the resentment, and enjoins the forgiveness of injuries, are at once the most powerful means of preserving peace, and the best adapted to the condition and character of mankind. Offences will come; the most rigorous enforcement of the laws of justice, and even the most sincere desire to obey them, will not prevent offences. The differences of people's opinions, interests, and position, are so great in regard to the affairs of the world; and the duties they have to perform to each other are so intricate, that the disposition not to resent injuries, but to

forgive them, is the only healing balm that cures our wounded spirits.

The peculiarly prominent place which these peaceful precepts hold in the Christian doctrine, was duly appreciated by the early Christians, as may be obviously seen in the writings of the Apostles and of the Fathers:—"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, neither give place to wrath; return not evil for evil, but contrariwise blessings and benefits." These were the constant exhortations addressed to the faithful. And their situation during the three first centuries, was favourable to such impressions. They formed but a small and persecuted sect. It was their interest, therefore, by such means, to deprecate the hostility of their foes; and men in such a position, feel more readily the force of principles by which they would be benefited. After professed Christians indeed, came to form the majority in society, and to have the upper hand, most of them forgot those maxims of peace; and in their angry contentions about theological disputes, and about ecclesiastical power and privileges, they manifested a spirit far different from that of peace. At the same time, the warlike character of the barbarians, who overran and subdued the empire, was exceedingly prejudicial to the influence of the peaceful spirit. But all these things were only so many obstacles which repressed the proper tendency of Christianity; and in accomplishing what it did in such unfavourable circumstances, its utility and tendency were only the more conspicuous. In spite of such disadvantages, Christians were still reminded upon solemn occasions, and particularly upon the approach of death, "that they must forgive, if they expected to be forgiven." The effect of this, was ultimately to put down that spirit of revenge, by which men formerly used to bequeath even their enmities to their posterity.

The clergy likewise, however much they acted inconsistently, when their theological or ecclesiastical privi-

leges were concerned, yet they remembered that they were men of peace, and did exert their influence during the middle ages, to preserve and to make peace between the petty kings and barons who were perpetually quarrelling. When they could not succeed otherwise, they commanded the combatants, in the name of God, to make *truces* for certain periods, during which the passions of the hostile parties might cool. They had even recourse to pretended miracles and revelations from heaven for that purpose, and were sometimes, no doubt, seriously persuaded of such miracles themselves. The intervals of peace so obtained, were called "the truce of God," and the clergy frequently succeeded in getting two or three days every week regularly consecrated to such truces. These regulations had a respect to what was called the rights and usages of private warfare, claimed by all the feudal barons, and before the power of civil government was restored, or rather constituted in the different countries of Europe.

And what was done in this respect by the bishops in each country, was afterwards done on a larger scale by the pope, among the kings. He frequently used his good offices in preserving and bringing about peace among them, and in settling their mutual quarrels. In this respect, the supremacy and power of the pope was a real benefit to society in those days; and the Protestant writers who can see nothing but evil in it, are misled by their prejudices. They associate the corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church with its *form of government*, and they seem to think that every thing is gained when this form is reduced, according to the wish of one party, from that of a monarchy to the select aristocracy of bishops, or, according to others, to the more extended aristocracy of presbyters; and, with a more radical class again, to the absolute democracy of independent congregations and lay-preachers.

Without inquiring whether the external polity of the

Church rests upon a divine right, or is the subject of human expediency, we may assert, as a matter of fact, that in the middle ages, and taking into view the attendant circumstances of the case, the monarchical form of government in Church as well as in State, had its advantages, and was so far authorised by Divine Providence. In the same manner the authority of Cesar was called an ordinance of God, by the apostles in their day; although we do not infer that the usurpation of Cesar was right, or that the form of his government was to be a model for succeeding ages, or for nations in a different state of social organization from the Romans. So, with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, let us do it justice and admit, that the spirit of Christianity, even under the form of monarchy, promoted and professed peace. If the popes did not act, when they themselves were concerned, as they taught, it was for the like reason that the lawyers, sitting in Moses' seat, did not perform what they enjoined on the people. Still that did not take away from the abstract truth and usefulness of what they taught, or of what was effected upon others by their doctrine and authority.

When we consider the excessive state of anarchy which prevailed in Europe for several centuries—the warlike and ruthless character of its new inhabitants (the Goths and Vandals)—the savage condition of their society at first, and the absolute worship which the Scandinavian tribes paid to Odin the god of war, together with the superstitions connected with that worship—the wonder is, that such fierce barbarians could have been won over in any measure to the peaceful principles of Christianity; yet it is undeniable that they ultimately were so. By the twelfth century, when their migrations had ceased, and they had attached themselves to the soils which they had conquered—when the age of chivalry commenced, and order began to take place in the respective governments of the great European family; the ferocity of war was mitigated, and the condition of conquered countries, and of

prisoners taken in war, was sensibly alleviated—because the barbarians had embraced Christianity.

That system, also, of moderation and humanity, and even the interchange of kind offices between the individuals of contending armies, by which modern manners are so remarkably distinguished from those of the ancients—that system commenced at the same time, and was the result of the Christian maxims being recognised. But the full benefit of this influence can be best understood by contrasting habits of warfare among the heathen, and before the Christian era, with the practices of modern times; and I will conclude this head of our observations, by an abridged extract from the historian from whom I have already made some quotations:—“In savage nations (says Dr. Cook) war is strictly a personal quarrel—every individual regards the injury that has roused indignation as done to himself. He goes forth to avenge it, in all the fury of unbridled passion. He endeavours to gratify his vengeance by taking his adversary, if possible, by surprise, and dwells with exultation on the sufferings he hopes to inflict. He bursts in the silence of night into the village of the hostile tribe, and involves in one shocking massacre, or a still more shocking captivity, the young, the aged, the helpless—deaf to the lamentations of the female sex over their murdered husbands and mangled children. In the field he struggles against his enemy with deadly hate. He scruples not to employ the most unworthy means to ensnare him, and with savage exultation and insult inflicts the mortal wound, or only spares him for future and lingering torment. When we come to the records of more polished nations, these sad traces of barbarity are still too plainly marked—war is still conducted under the influence of personal excitement. The immense numbers of slain, show that personal destruction was the object of the combatants. Even after the termination of the contest, the prisoners are punished, enslaved, or put to death, as if they had been guilty of a crime,

perhaps only in defending their country. When Achilles had triumphed over Hector and slain him, he dragged his dead body at the wheels of his chariot around the walls of Troy, and the polished Greeks delighted to record and listen to the history of such exploits. The wars of the Spartans, of the Athenians, and of the Romans, were all conducted with much cruelty and bloodshed; and the dismal fate of the Helots, and the slaves whom they made captive, abundantly proves that even the most cultivated of the ancient nations had not emancipated themselves from the inhuman prejudices and violence of barbarous ages. The Romans, in particular, made a trade of war. Whenever it appeared to them that the humiliation of any state would promote the welfare, or rather the aggrandisement of their own, they never hesitated to invade it, and they carried on their operations against it with the same rancour as if they had been roused by the most aggravated injuries. They sacked, and pillaged, and stormed cities—they spread desolation over cultivated fields—they enslaved or murdered many of the inhabitants—and after having reduced the territory to subjection, they placed it under the administration of some of their citizens, by whom it was further oppressed.”

Such enormities as these, if they do sometimes occur in modern warfare, are only exceptions to the general rule, and the authors of them are held up to the execration of mankind; while the principle of conquest, however it may privately influence some ambitious princes, dare not be avowed, and in point of fact, has never been suffered to any extent among the states of modern Europe.

CHAPTER VII.

A FOURTH good effect produced by Christianity on the state of society in Europe, was the taste which it inspired

or cherished for the acquisition of knowledge. This assertion may seem at first view a little inconsistent, when it is recollected that the middle ages were proverbially marked as ages of darkness and barbarity. That darkness, however, was the consequence of the conquests of the barbarians, and of the almost entire extirpation of the former inhabitants, who had been civilised by the Romans. But what we assert is, that whatever knowledge was preserved in those unhappy times, it was through the influence and medium of Christianity; and when mankind again began to cultivate science, this disposition was cherished by the Christian religion, as it would not have been by any other. In short, there is a natural alliance between knowledge and Christianity, and a tendency in each to promote the interests of the other.

It was a feature in the character of Jesus Christ, as a teacher, and in those days it was almost a peculiar one, that he framed and designed his doctrine to be taught to and understood by all men, by old and young, by rich and poor, by high and low, by male and female, by bond and free. The philosophers of old never expected the mass of society to attend to or comprehend their doctrines, and they frequently concealed it purposely, under mysterious symbols and terms. This might be partly because it was opposed to the vulgar superstitions, and therefore unpopular on first view. But no matter what was their motive, still the idea of enlightening and instructing the whole body of the people never entered into their minds. But Christ enjoined this as a duty on his disciples, and allied this injunction with motives of benevolence to men, and of religion toward God, which gave it a most powerful impulse. True, it was only a certain kind of knowledge, but it was the most valuable of all kinds of it, and—even the philosophers themselves being judges—the most noble and sublime.

Socrates and Plato, in morals and in theology, speculated about nothing more sublime—nothing so much so

—as the most humble Christian teacher. The words of Jesus, upon another occasion, might be well applied to this case: “Verily I say unto you, among those that have been born of women, there have not been greater philosophers than Socrates and Plato, but he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they.” Besides, he that hath attained to what is greatest, will more readily attend to, and will more easily acquire what is less. There is a certain connection between all branches of knowledge, and an inquisitive Christian can scarcely fail to study some of them, that are more nearly related to his own. The previous history of Providence, and of the world, for instance, contained in the Old Testament, is intimately connected with the history and evidence of his own faith; and if he is not restrained by some of those stupid superstitions which obscured the Christian faith in the dark ages, he will naturally extend his inquiries into the history of the collateral nations in whose fate that of the people of God was so intimately interwoven. For the same reason, he will study the progress of Christianity, the state of manners and opinions in the world which may affect its success—in other words, he will not confine his study of Providence to the ages of the world previous to the Christian era. The further development of it, and the condition of the world, are objects at all times of deep professional interest (if I may so speak) to the Christian.

Again, if he have the germs of literary taste in him, he will be charmed with the simple narrations and beautiful poetry of the inspired writers and prophets, and in the study of them cultivate his taste; if he is disposed to study the works and the laws of nature, he will do it with so much the more zest and zeal, because the God whom he loves and adores is the author of them. Now, we do not mean that every Christian necessarily cultivates those studies. Among them, as among the rest of mankind, a great many have neither the taste nor the leisure for such things; but we say, that Christianity (in its pure forms) has the tendency

to awaken, to cherish, and to extend such tastes and studies, and from them the mass of society, although not personally engaged, derive the most extensive benefits, and even a portion of the light which surrounds them, through the medium of social intercourse and conversation.

Such, we may be satisfied, was the natural tendency of the Christian doctrine, and history proves, that such were its effects, so far as it was allowed to exert its influence, in circumstances which we have seen operating so unfavourably against its proper influence.

Among the Christians of the second and third centuries, many were distinguished for their erudition according to their notions of the terms, and by means of it, defended their religion against the heathen authors, who by this period had begun to attack it. After the age of Constantine, when the disciples were no longer depressed and persecuted, they were in a condition to cultivate general knowledge more commonly and more successfully than in former ages, and in this they were encouraged by the Christian Emperors, "who (says Mosheim) left no means unemployed to excite and maintain a spirit of literary emulation among the professors of Christianity. For this purpose, schools were established in many cities; libraries were also erected, and men of genius and learning were nobly recompensed by the honours and advantages attached to the cultivation of the arts and sciences." This testimony is the more remarkable, because, speaking of the former century (the third) the same author says: "The arts and sciences were now in a declining state. The celebrated rhetorician Longinus, and the historian Dion Cassius, were the last eminent scholars among the Greeks. Men of learning and genius were still less numerous in the western or Latin provinces. Different reasons (he adds) contributed to this decay of learning, and among others, few of the (heathen) Emperors patronised the sciences, or encouraged, by the prospect of their favour and protection, that emulation which is the soul of letters."

The more general causes of the decay of learning Mosheim alludes to, were the civil wars, and the frequent incursions of barbarians; but so far as these operated, they were common to the empire after it became Christian, and indeed they ultimately became infinitely worse; but what we are concerned with is this—that while certain general and extrinsic causes were sinking the world into ignorance and barbarity, the influence of Christianity was operating in favour of knowledge. And when at length the ruin of the Emperors deprived learning of all the countenance and support it received from them, it found refuge among the Christian priests and the monasteries.

“During those tumultuous scenes of desolation and horror (says our historian), the arts and sciences would have been totally extinguished, had they not found a place of refuge, such as it was, among the bishops and monastic orders. Here they assembled their scattered remains, and received a degree of culture which kept them from perishing. Those churches, in particular, which were distinguished by the name of Cathedrals, had schools erected under their jurisdiction, in which the bishop, or some person appointed by him, instructed the youth in what they called the *seven liberal arts*.* And in the monasteries, persons of both sexes, who had retired to them, were obliged by the founders of their respective orders to employ a certain portion of their time in reading.” And this was a great accomplishment in those days, when not even princes and nobles could either read or write. Their reading, indeed, was chiefly confined to the legends of the saints and the doctrines of the church; but it was well that the practice of reading was preserved at all, as it still afforded an opportunity to persons of an inquisitive disposition to study other branches of the ancient learning preserved in the libraries which were formed in every

* Grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, music, mathematics, and astronomy.

monastery. For the same reason, the art of writing was cultivated, in order to multiply copies of the literary works which they possessed. From such circumstances, the clergy were almost the only persons who could read or write, and they received their name on that account—clerks or clergy—and were invested with several legal privileges on that score above the rest of the community, under the title of “benefit of the clergy,” of which some remains are to be found to this day.

Nor was it merely in what is technically called learning that the Christian clergy of those days excelled; they likewise preserved and cultivated the practical and useful arts. Many of the monks were excellent mechanics, and were indeed obliged by their rules to learn some handicraft, and more especially they excelled in agriculture, and employed themselves in cultivating those immense tracts of territory which had been devastated or abandoned during the times of anarchy. This devastation had been carried to such a length, that natural forests sprung up and covered large tracts of land which had been formerly cultivated. Indeed, when we consider that the barbarians who had conquered the empire were only wandering tribes, depending on pasture and hunting for their subsistence, and not upon agriculture—consequently ignorant of most even of the common arts of life—when we consider this, it is evident that had it not been for the clergy, the state of society might have been depressed to that savage degree from which it cannot emerge again for a vast length of time, as in the states of Greece and Rome, where the period of this natural progress, extended over more than a thousand years.*

But by means of the knowledge preserved as above-mentioned, the nations of Europe, in the middle ages, had the materials, so soon as order was restored, to start again in their progress, with the stock which

* That is, from the first settlement of Greece, or from the building of Rome, to the age of Constantine.

had been accumulated in former ages. And hence, although in certain accomplishments, such as poetry and eloquence, they remained for a time behind the polished Greeks and Romans, yet they very quickly outstripped them in other matters of greater utility, and in due time rivalled them also even in those arts and sciences which had been brought to a state of comparative perfection among the ancients.



CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE we have ascribed so much to the influence of Christianity, it is never meant that there were not other causes co-operating in the improvement of society. So far from wishing to undervalue or to keep out of sight such causes where there is occasion for taking notice of them, our argument proceeds all along upon the doctrine of there being a positive plan and superintendence of Divine Providence in educating the human race; and to which plan, many other events were made subservient or lent a co-operation. Thus, if the Gothic tribes, so far inferior to the Romans and Greeks in many respects, were yet superior to them in their spirit of liberty, and in the respect with which they treated their females; we perceive in such circumstances only a concurring and well-timed aid to the same principles as taught and cherished by the Christian religion. In a similar manner, if the arts of making paper and of printing, discovered in the 14th and 15th centuries, contributed mightily to the preservation and diffusion of knowledge generally; it was the same knowledge which had been preserved and fostered in the bosom of the Church.

About the same period, and by the restoration of civil order and better principles of government—by the revived

taste for the study of ancient learning, and by many new discoveries in the arts and sciences—by all these concurrent circumstances, the elements of a new condition of European society were planted—a condition which has every appearance of becoming permanent, unlike the successive monarchies of antiquity.

When we consider the superiority of Europe over the rest of the world, it is plain that the state of society in it, will at last extend its influence and its manners over all the other quarters of the globe; and thus, under whatever modification it may undergo, will determine the ultimate destiny of man. All these things are admitted; still it is unquestionable that Christianity was deeply and extensively interwoven with the whole fabric of this new system. Its laws, its institutions, its manners, have been all modified by Christianity. It is true, that many of the Christian doctrines were likewise mingled with the superstitions of heathenism; so that, in abandoning or exposing such superstitions, men have sometimes attempted to discard Christianity also, and to deny its benefits. But this was only a temporary aberration of the human intellect, led astray by a false idea of what Christianity was. Even when men had been thus prejudiced against the nominal forms of the Christian religion, they have borrowed many of its best practical principles; and when the natural source of such principles shall be duly pointed out, they will become more extensively influential, because they will be separated from the errors formerly associated with them.

It is hoped that the separate view which we have taken of what was spurious and what was genuine, in the nominal Christianity of the middle ages, and the opposite effects which they produced, will tend to establish this remark; and it will be further confirmed by the views which shall present themselves to us, in tracing the character and consequences of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Before proceeding, however, let us take a

stand at the present stage or point of view to which we have arrived, and look back for a moment to ascertain the general result of our observations on the progress of society, from the commencement of the Christian era to modern times generally, as commencing about the period of the Reformation.

When we compare the condition of society at the beginning and end of this time, the progress is so manifest, that no thinking person will now deny it. In intellectual, moral, and social attainments, we are undoubtedly far above the ancients. The instances in which they excelled and for which they were so much admired and followed (when Europe was only emerging from the anarchy and ignorance of the middle ages,) were even of a nature to mark the infant state of the human mind in those admired ancients. The knowledge in which they had made proficiency, was chiefly astronomy and mathematics—that is to say, the external positions, motions, and forms of matter. These were more readily observed and more easily determined, than the *internal* structure and intrinsic properties of its varieties.

The ancients knew almost nothing of Chemistry and other branches of natural philosophy, and little of physiology or animal history. Their limited commerce and navigation kept them comparatively ignorant of geography, and of the productions and condition of remote countries. In all these instances, they had acquired only what could be gained by individuals in their own lifetime, or at most by the accumulated observations of a very few successive philosophers and writers. There had, as yet, been no ample store of facts and speculations collected—no results of long and enlarged experience, of which ingenious men can avail themselves in pushing forward their investigations into the field of science. For want of these, no great progress can ever be made by the efforts of any individual mind, or of a few minds.

The eminence of the ancients in the arts of poetry,

eloquence, and sculpture, was the result of individual genius, and of that kind which is most luxuriant in the *youth* both of men and of nations. This acquirement certainly infused a taste which so far refined their manners in some instances. A critical and copious language (the result of such studies) was useful also, as an instrument of thought, for the further development of the intellectual faculties. But the moderns have succeeded to the possession of all those advantages or attainments, and have added to them the discoveries of a more matured intellect, of more ample experience, and of more numerous and accomplished students of nature.

All this was the natural and necessary result of that progressive development of the human faculties, which we have formerly noticed. We have said, that in this point of view, the superiority of the moderns over the ancients is unquestionable; and when to this we add our acknowledged improvements in moral, political, and social sciences and manners, the whole together mark a striking progress in society, and a distinct development of the powers of the human mind.

To this characteristic tendency of society and of human nature, Christianity was adapted. It promoted the progress of society, and its own success was at the same time secured by the same progress.

Such is the result to which we have arrived, after considering the improvements ultimately effected in the social condition of Europe, by the events of the middle ages, and by the favourable influence of the Christian religion in promoting or producing such improvements. At the same time, we have seen how the evils of that unhappy period, which have been frequently ascribed to religion, were only the result of its abuse and corruption. There is an inference to be drawn from this general conclusion, of great importance upon all occasions, but especially so in the view we have, of entering into the consideration of events and of characters of a more modern

date, connected with the Reformation. We are too apt to be swayed in our judgments by a partiality for or prejudice against names and authorities which have lately preceded our own times, and which have still some influence in the interests and feelings of those parties in Church and State with whom we may be connected. But we should listen to the voice of experience, and remember that the same or similar causes will always produce the same or similar effects.

The inference or moral which we speak of, is this: Among those things usually considered as part and parcel of Christianity, there is a very marked distinction. There are, first—the dogmas of faith contained in the creeds and systems of divinity, the rites and ceremonies of worship, and the power of the church, or, which is the same thing, the privileges of the clergy (for they are the depositaries of its power)—these form one class of things. There is another class, namely—the principles and precepts of the Christian morality, such as we have endeavoured to point out. Now, in the historical survey which we have taken, we have seen, that all the hatred and strife—all the corruption and superstition—all the persecution and bloodshed with the accounts of which ecclesiastical history is stained—all these have arisen out of, or about the things of the first class, namely, the dogmas of divinity and the pretensions of the Church. On the other hand, all the benefits which society has received from Christianity, have flowed from the influence of the things of the second class, *viz.* the principles and precepts of its Morality. Which of these two sorts of things, therefore, are of God? Which of them are likely to be the doctrines of that Master whose principles and mission were undeniably, to give light, and to promote peace and love in the world?

Or which of them may we presume to be the most *peculiar* and *essential* doctrines of his religion, supposing that both of them have some relation to or foundation in it? Or rather, have we not reason to presume, that the

subjects of dispute and of unholy passions, have been a parcel of those commandments of men, and of vain traditions or fancies, by which, in all ages, the word of God has been made of none effect? We need not hesitate. A good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and an evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit; therefore, by their fruits let us judge and characterise these two classes of things, hitherto confounded under the general name of Christianity. And having so judged, let us gather the wheat into our stores, and cast the chaff and the tares away. Verily, thus it shall be at the *end of the age*—in the latter day—when Christ shall come to *reign*, and no longer to *teach*.*

His teaching we have enjoyed long enough, but if we will not yield obedience, he will cast us off—our churches and clergy, with their pretensions—our systems of divinity, with their disputes—our formalities and ceremonies—our parties and shibboleths—all into outer darkness, there (among their adherents) shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Alas! for Babylon the great is fallen, fallen! Amen! rejoice ye holy Apostles and Prophets, or men of like spirit on earth, true followers of Jesus and of his doctrines; for thus God avengeth his elect. But I am anticipating the course of history, and end of our argument. All this I trust, however, shall be made as clear as sunshine by the time we have done. Meantime, it is good to fix our mind on the tendency and probable result of our investigation.

I must make a remark here, however, about the clergy, to prevent mistakes. You see I have not hesitated to ascribe the great source of mischief, to their inventions, their disputes, their vanity, their ambition, and their avarice. But I have no illiberal prejudice against them as a class of men set apart for the purpose of public instruction, and for the propagation and defence of the

* We do not suppose a personal appearance of Christ as necessary to his *reign*.

gospel. If there had been no class of men who made this their business and profession—if the doctrines of Christ had been simply published in a book by his disciples, as those of Socrates were, and left to their own intrinsic influence, they might only have been known and admired by a few of the learned. They would not have penetrated into the mass of society, and been preserved and extended as they have been; and, consequently, the world would have been little benefited by Christianity.

We acknowledge and admire the wisdom of that institution and that example which our Lord set, in *preaching* to the people, in selecting chosen disciples, and commanding them and all persons generally, who had seen his actions and heard his words, “to go and teach all nations” what they had seen and heard. The Apostles, in like manner, left the same charge specially to some of their disciples, and generally to the elders or bishops of the churches; and thus Christianity was preserved and propagated in a manner of which there were no former examples in the world: the propagation of other doctrines, in after times, by like means being only an imitation. All this, and other benefits formerly mentioned, we owe to the clergy: by whom we mean all persons, of every denomination, who devote themselves to such labours, inspired by that spirit of philanthropy and of truth which animated their Master.

But it was not this legitimate exercise of their office, nor the original nature of the office itself, that did the mischief—it was the pretensions and privileges which they added to it, or which ignorant and superstitious ages yielded voluntarily to them, and by which the Christian teachers set up to be *priests*, according to the order of the Jewish and heathen priesthood, that is, intercessors with God—the only authorised interpreters of his will—and the exclusive depositaries of his word.

It was by them, and in this manner, that the *Revelation* of Jesus Christ, that is to say, his *clear and popular ex-*

hibition of truth, level to the understanding of all men, was converted into a *mystery*, and made a source of gain and power to those who pretended to be in the *secret*; whether they were popes, bishops, presbyters, monastic friars, or the *gifted* brethren of independent congregations. All such persons, so far as they deviate from the original design of their office or their gifts, and set up pretensions to exclusive privileges and knowledge, form part and parcel of that *mystery of iniquity** spoken of by Christ and his Apostles, and symbolised in the Apocalypse, the brazen-faced and drunken strumpet, who rode upon the beast, having on her forehead the watchword of her partisans, *Mystery*, but who was in reality Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and of all abominations.

* The pretensions of such persons, of possessing some mystery which the people at large cannot understand, is very curious. All matters of knowledge are mysteries, to be sure, in the first instance, to the unlearned. The simple art of reading, for one, must appear a *mystery* to a savage; but whenever he is instructed, the mystery is at an end. No teacher of such mysteries, however, pretends to know more of the matter than the disciple whom he has *once instructed*. Nay, from superior capacity or application, the unprofessional man may happen to have more understanding of, and more expertness in, the matter than his quondam teacher. Professional teachers, indeed, are still necessary to instruct the new generations of mankind, or those whose education may have been neglected. But our theologians are not content with this. They assume a peculiar *gnosis* of divine things, and a personal *influence* with God, to which none else must lay claim.

ON THE
MORAL CONSTITUTION AND HISTORY
OF
MAN.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN we look back through the history of the world, we see that there have always been some favoured nations or people, who, enjoying a superior civilisation above their neighbours, have influenced and governed the progress of society. The earliest of these were the Jews, by virtue of their religion. To them succeeded the Greeks, with their literature; and after them, the Romans, with their arts and their arms. All these influences were in general and simultaneous operation during the reign of the Christian Emperors of Rome, and have been since embodied into that confederation of states which we call Christendom, or modern Europe.

Whatever we may find occasionally to interest us and to approve in other states and empires which have passed away, or in those monarchies and forms of society which have existed, for time immemorial, in Asia, from the Gulf of Persia to the eastern shores of China—it is remarkable, that in none of those countries can we trace the marks of that *progress* of society which has formed the topic of our investigation. Those countries have been

permitted to remain stationary, if not to retrograde, while the grand experiment of human education has been proceeding in the west of Asia and in Europe. It is pretty clear, therefore, that other parts of the world have followed or must follow the fate of European society, and have their ultimate condition determined by the causes which primarily affect it: in which point of view, the march of intellect and of events in Christendom, embraces the whole interests of mankind.

Now, as in the world at large, the particular countries we have specified, have had a distinguished place in the plans and operations of Providence, so in Europe itself, certain countries, certain parties, and certain men, occupy a more important place than others, and on such account deserve our more particular regard. Since the sixteenth century, this has been more specially the case with the nations and the persons who embraced the principles of the Reformation; and, for that reason our attention must now be peculiarly called to the character and consequences of that great revolution in European affairs. We do not wish to depreciate the Roman Catholics. The abuses of their system of religion, were in many respects the result of those times of ignorance and barbarity which preceded the era of the Reformation. Practically, the Catholics of the present day are not what their ancestors were in the middle ages. They, too, have been carried forward by the force of events and the changes in public opinion. It may even be granted, that their *conservative* spirit preserved many ancient and primitive doctrines or practices, which the innovating spirit of the Reformers made them reject, along with those abuses which were indefensible. In some points of view, Catholicism may be favourably contrasted with Protestantism. But, after all allowances, and in regard to the *progress* of society and of public opinion, the Protestant principles have been the *moving* force since the sixteenth century. The Roman Catholics have followed, but they never led the way in any *forward* move-

ments of moral truth, liberty, and reforms. From such considerations, our subject naturally requires us now to study the character and consequences of the Reformation.

In this matter, as in our sketch of the first centuries and middle ages, we shall find a mixture of things both to approve and to condemn; but we cannot so conveniently separate them entirely in our discussion. The principle of *good*, indeed, which was set in motion by that great revolution, may be very simply stated in a few words. It was the determination or rather the profession of *Reform*, including as it necessarily did, the idea of *progress* in reference to preceding ages. The Inquisition had in a great measure suppressed the germ of this principle, fermenting everywhere in the public mind. The Reformation asserted and legalised it. So far, the spirit of the movement was unquestionably and entirely good; but the leading men in this revolution, did not always follow out their own principles; and in other instances, they fell into errors from their ignorance, inexperience, and prejudices. In order, therefore, to form a true judgment of the events and its consequences, we shall be obliged, while we point out its good tendencies only in general terms, to enter more minutely into the circumstances which retarded or modified its influence, and thereby stamped upon it its peculiar character. In doing this, we may perhaps sometimes appear harsh to the indiscriminate admirers of the Reformation; but our paramount object is truth, which must be told, whether it please some people or not; but if they will have patience to follow us to the end, they will find that our conclusions are not always what they might anticipate.

With these views, it is not the external events and revolutions which it produced, that will chiefly concern us. It has been, and will continue indeed to be, necessary to take notice of some of those events; but only as indications and proof of the internal spirit which was at work in moulding the character of the times, and which spirit

we must trace and define by its own direct operations, in order to become properly acquainted with it.

We have seen, in a previous part of our discussion, that the first aberration of professing Christians, from the clear and simple doctrine of their Master, arose from an undue preference given to the doctrine of atonement above the moral doctrine, and afterwards how this led to ideas of it which were positively erroneous. From these false ideas, as from a common root, sprung up all those varied corruptions, the history of which we traced, till at length they arrived to a degree of enormity which shocked the common sense of mankind, and raised a universal cry for Reform.

The first and most eminent Reformers saw the matter in this light, and therefore did not content themselves with exposing and remedying gross practical abuses; they laboured, by what they considered a more evangelical doctrine, to exterminate the very root of all such corruptions. They remarked that the veneration paid to the Saints and to the Virgin Mary, was a virtual transfer of the honour due only to Christ, as the sole mediator or intercessor between God and man. "There were thus gradually set up (says a Protestant writer) other mediators than the Son of God, and that exclusive confidence in his intercession which is implied in the doctrine of his atonement, was practically disregarded." In the same manner, the Reformers observed that the superstitions connected with the Eucharist, and its alleged conversion into a real sacrifice, originated in the tenet of transubstantiation, or of other mysterious ideas concerning the personal presence of Christ in the sacramental elements. Thus, also, the notion so long prevalent respecting the merit of self-inflicted mortifications, pilgrimages, crusades, and monastic vows, was such, that persons who had been eminent for them, were supposed to have an extra stock of good works,

some part of which might be imputed and made available to others who were deficient. "And although *heresy* was nominally avoided, by still speaking in scriptural terms of the superior merits of Christ, yet (says our historian) it is perfectly evident, that if good works could be pleaded as a ground of acceptance with God, and could be so abundantly performed, as not only to suffice for the performer himself, but to furnish a stock for others—in whatever words the advocates of such doctrine might speak concerning the sufferings, the death, and intercession of Christ, as the sole efficient cause of reconciliation—they did in fact deny and subvert his atonement. These inferences, in their direct form, would not perhaps be admitted, but they exerted their full practical influences, and thus the false doctrine of *merit* led to the most lamentable and debasing corruption of religion, and substituted for it a puerile and pernicious superstition."*

From these and similar causes, the Reformers were induced to lay a special stress on the doctrines of atonement and justification, conceiving that from false ideas of them, the whole corruptions of the Church of Rome had sprung, and that by means of just ideas of them every thing could be set to rights. They were confirmed in this opinion, by remarking the resemblance which the controversy with the Church of Rome assumed under this view, with that of Paul against the Judaizing teachers, the one being arranged on the side of *free grace*, the other on the side of *works*; and for this reason, they had a special veneration for the writings of Paul, believing that he had given a more complete exhibition of what they called the *scheme* or *plan* of salvation, than even Christ had done in his personal teachings.

Connected with such sentiments regarding the doctrine of the atonement and justification, the theology of the Reformers was likewise associated with those speculations

* Cooke's Historical View of Christianity.

concerning “the fall of man, and the condition of his moral powers,” which had been agitated in the Church in the fifth century, and which were generally established by the authority of Augustine. The whole of these opinions together, formed a system of doctrine which has been called *Evangelical*, and which the early Protestants assumed to be peculiar to, and characteristic of their communion. The Catholics, indeed, did not admit this pretension, and the truth was, that these doctrines had been long known in the Church, and so late as at the Council of Trent, had been in many instances formally recognised; but the Protestants persisted in asserting, that the doctrines and practices of the Romish Church, had at any rate the *tendency* of virtually subverting what they alleged to be the true doctrine of the atonement, of justification, and of the depravity of human nature. They constantly held up such doctrines prominently to view, and accused the Catholics of the opposite sentiments; and in support of their doctrine, they appealed to the authority and arguments of Paul, contained in his Epistles to the Galatians and Romans.

Thus, the Reformation, which originated in a desire to correct practical abuses, terminated in the assertion of a particular theology. The creeds, confessions, and articles of all the Reformed National Churches, bear ample evidence of this. Along with this, to be sure, there was a new model of Church government introduced, and varying somewhat in different countries. These were all opposed to the Church of Rome on the point of the Hierarchy; but in other respects, the privileges and claims of the clergy were substantially preserved.

This change in the Ecclesiastical forms of government, and their zeal for what they called Evangelical doctrine, were therefore the principal fruit and object of the Protestant Churches. They did not pay any particular attention to the Christian Morality. They were contented with the ten commandments of Moses, or a commentary on them, and with such a degree of attention to the precepts

of benevolence as had forced itself generally and indirectly on the European society. As Churches of Christ generally, or as Protesters against the Church of Rome, the Christian Morality *formed no part of their testimony*.

This is a simple and indisputable fact, and the consequence of this special and limited view was, a revival, under new forms, of all those disputes, and of that intolerance and even persecution for speculative opinions, which characterised the introduction of similar topics in the fourth and fifth centuries. For some time these controversies had been mostly laid aside by general consent, or prudently kept in the back ground by the Popes, who avoided as much as they could, giving any decisions on such points when appealed to. It has been said, indeed, that controversy had in a great measure ceased in the Church, from the sheer want of intellect to conduct it during the dark ages; but if the human mind may be considered as having in some respects gone to sleep for several centuries, it would appear that when it was awakened, it still had its former propensities, and as soon as opportunities were afforded, it set about its old exercises. No matter how we may account for it, the fact was so. The Reformation was prolific of controversies, carried on with all the customary bitterness of theological feuds.

No doubt, this was ultimately productive of good, in sifting the mass of rubbish that had accumulated for ages, in sharpening the intellect, and at last eliciting truth; but it marked the Reformation as an era of *transition* from an old state of society to a new one, rather than as having formed a permanent condition itself. It was a period of *destruction* and controversy, rather than of *renovation*; and its influence in this character, has descended to our day. It has not yet completely spent its force, and fulfilled its mission. But let us contemplate a little more in detail this controversial character which the Reformation assumed—its progress and effects.

We have remarked how intimately certain false ideas concerning the importance or the nature of Atonements, are connected with, or lead to, consequences which deeply affect the moral and religious sentiments of mankind. Of this truth the first Reformers (as we have said) had a general conception; but in the room of the olden superstitions about atonements, they were content with substituting certain new metaphysical notions of their own. They did not revert to that doctrine of a benevolent Deity and a benevolent morality, which, we have shown, came in the room of, and was intended to supersede, all the doctrines of atonement whatever. The moral character and influence of the Reformation, was consequently and deeply affected, by the opinions which the leading Reformers entertained on this subject; and for that reason, we must now investigate them. For this purpose, we shall require to consider also in detail, some collateral opinions, which necessarily modify men's ideas on the subject of Atonement, and which evidently influenced those of the early Protestants.

One, and the chief of these, was the opinion entertained respecting "the moral constitution and condition of man." This was a subject which had particularly attracted the attention of the Fathers of the Church in the fifth century, during the Pelagian controversy, and concerning which the opinions of Augustine had generally prevailed. These opinions were received, along with other dogmas of a similar origin, with a kind of implicit credit by future ages, and especially by Luther, Calvin, and other Protestant leaders. It was only the corruption of the Church *subsequent* to the age of Augustine, against which the zeal of the Reformers was directed. They did not suspect any error in the theology of the Church previous to that period.

Among the early Fathers there was a considerable latitude of opinion, or at least of expression, about the moral powers of man, and various other topics, which came to

be the subjects of controversy and of more nice definition in the fourth or fifth centuries. A general idea, however, of the *moral infirmity* of human nature prevailed, and seemed amply justified by the mass of evil which abounded in society, and of which every reflecting person felt the seeds in his own bosom—in the force of his passions and prejudices. Christianity, as a doctrine of *salvation*, evidently rested upon this presumption, and hence the necessity of being *regenerated*, was regarded as one of its first principles. But very wild notions came to be entertained of the nature of this regeneration, and of the power and means by which it was to be accomplished. The most common theory on the subject, was, that the source of moral evil lay in the *flesh*, and was to be conquered by mortifications, by retirement from society, and by devotional exercises. The influence of evil spirits was likewise supposed to be very great, and to be opposed by exorcisms of various kinds.

Connected with these ideas were certain speculations of the Jewish and Oriental schools, about the origin of evil in paradise; by the temptation of the serpent, the moral poison of the forbidden fruit, and its effects, especially over the liberty of the *will*, which it was alleged that Adam had lost for himself and his posterity by his fall. This latter topic was more particularly enlarged upon after the introduction of the Grecian philosophy, or dialectic, into the theology of the Church. From the combined influences of all these opinions, there was concocted the doctrine of “Original Sin,” and the abettors of it, like all the zealous disputants of the times, carried their ideas to such an extreme, that they denied to human nature the existence of any thing good whatever, or any degree of power to do or to become good.

This conclusion, so palpably opposed to the notorious fact, that man had really *some* good dispositions, and *some* moral powers, which might be improved or debased, led Pelagius and others to contravert the doctrine of original

sin, and to “assert that the sin of Adam was wholly personal—that it produced no effect upon the moral condition of mankind—and that, by the exertion of their own powers and faculties, men are still capable of arriving at the same measure of perfection which our first parents might have reached.” This is one view of his doctrine; but with regard to his ideas of this moral capacity, which he assumed to be the same in Adam and in his posterity, it is said by other historians that Pelagius taught “that mankind were capable of arriving at the *highest* degrees of piety and of virtue, by the sole use of their *natural powers*—at least, that although external grace or instruction might be necessary to excite their endeavours, they had no need of any internal aid from the Holy Spirit of God; and in connection with this idea, it followed, that good works were meritorious, and the proper condition of salvation.”

We must remark, however, that such views of the doctrine of Pelagius, like those given of all the ancient heretics (as they were called), are taken from the writings of his opponents, and may very probably consist rather of what such opponents considered to be the inferences from, or tendency of his doctrines, than his positive assertions. Be that as it may, however, the Pelagian heresy, as it is generally understood, and as it was viewed by the early Reformers (believers in Augustine and Jerome), amounted to what is above stated, and in that view, therefore, we are to be considered as speaking of it.

Now, the reader may remark, that neither Augustine, who supported and extended the previous doctrine, nor Pelagius, who opposed it, ever doubted that Adam was created perfect, or at least with such intellectual and moral powers as were competent to preserve him sufficiently from the temptations to which mankind are subject, from their constitution and circumstances. Neither of these theologians, nor their partisans, reflected, that both Adam and his children, in their individual infancy, and in the infancy of society, were necessarily ignorant, inexperi-

enced, and under the preponderant influence of animal propensities and passions—and of the two, Adam rather more so than his posterity. Ignorant of this radical truth, and of the plan of the moral government of God, as a system of progressive education for mankind as a species, it was impossible for them to clear up the questions involved in their controversy; and hence it followed, that although the majority ranged themselves on one side, the opposite opinions never ceased to have advocates, and to be revived in one form or another.

The truth was, that the disputants were both right, and both wrong, upon different points; the theory of neither party could harmonise the facts of the case, and accordingly, the partisans of each theory always have been, and always will be, puzzled how to reconcile their doctrine with specific facts. Thus, when Augustine was pressed to show how his doctrine, of original sin being conveyed from parents to children, could be consistent with the institution of marriage—a divine appointment, or an ordinance of nature—and consequently holy and pure in itself—he did not know what to answer. He sometimes, indeed, talked of the essence of original sin lying in “concupiscence or inordinate desire,” but his explanations of that term were vague and unsatisfactory. Indeed, he confessed, at length, the difficulty of the subject, and escaped by asserting, that he was not bound to answer such objections.

Some of his followers, however, made the attempt, and after much grave discussion, decided “that as the soul was created directly by God, there could indeed be no sin *in it*—that the infection, therefore, must be in the *flesh*, having been occasioned either by the poisonous nature of the forbidden fruit, or by the venomous breath of the serpent; and that it was infused into the flesh of infants, in consequence of its being a part of the flesh of their parents. The material frame having in this manner become contaminated, the direful infection was extended to

the soul, just as a pure liquor, when poured into an infected or foul vessel, becomes foul and corrupted."

But this explanation would not do, for many of those inordinate propensities which we call animal, from the circumstance of the brutes having similar passions, have no more connection with the flesh than with the spirit—for instance, anger, selfishness, and the inordinate feelings to which they give rise.

By the time of the Reformation, therefore, when the oriental doctrine of Manicheism had lost all direct influence over the speculations of theologians, such explanations were considered puerile, and a new idea was started and ultimately adopted and propagated, particularly by Calvin. It was supposed no longer necessary to consider the contagion of sin as being seated either in the soul or the body particularly; but it was alleged that God had made a *Covenant* with Adam, as the great federal head of mankind, the condition of which was, that his posterity should share the blessings or the curses attached to the fulfilment or breach of it; and that Adam having forfeited his title by transgression, "all mankind sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression." As for the objection, that an unborn person could not sin, the answer was, "that Adam's sin was *imputed* to each of his descendants."

This theory of a Covenant (for it was a mere theory) lies at the bottom of all the Protestant theology, and I have traced the historical origin of it, in order to bring forward a clear view of those principles which modified the character of the Reformation, and through it, and for some time, the moral character of the most active and influential states of Europe.



CHAPTER II.

THE idea of a supposed Covenant between Adam and his Maker on earth, was associated in the new theology with that of another Covenant among the three persons of the Trinity in heaven, or rather between the Father and the Son specially. By virtue of this transaction, it was supposed that the Father, representing the Godhead, and insisting on strict justice being executed against Adam and his posterity, agreed notwithstanding, to be *satisfied* by the Son undergoing the punishment incurred by Adam, and otherwise fulfilling the divine law; so that the merit of his suffering and virtue might be *imputed* to sinners, and the consequences of the fall so far remedied, in regard to those who were selected for that favour, or who would believe in and acquiesce with the propriety of the arrangement.

This doctrine, of course, takes that of the Trinity for granted; but it goes a step beyond it, for while a person may be persuaded that there is a certain threefold distinction, or varied manifestation of the Deity, spoken of in the Scriptures, *viz.* the Father, Word, and Spirit, yet while these are at the same time asserted to be One, it seems only a metaphysical or apparent distinction, which he may explain the best way he can; but when the Father and the Word (for Son is not the proper name of the second person, but only the name of the incarnate Word) are invested with distinct moral dispositions and attributes—the one of *severe justice*, and the other of *mercy and kindness*—they are made, to all intents and purposes, two different beings, of opposite character and conduct. In regard to the matter of atonement and justification, the one of these persons is supposed to demand satisfaction, and the other to give it, and by this view of the subject, the Protestants imagined that they struck at the very root

of all the false ideas which had crept in among the Catholics about the *merit* of human works in the matter of justification, seeing that it rested entirely on the *merit* of Christ.

I am aware that the assertion above made, regarding the difference of moral character in the Father and the Son (for I will use the term Son, since it has become the usual name in theology for the second person of the Trinity, although I have denied the accuracy of it)—I say, my assertion of the difference of their moral character will be denied, because, say the Evangelicals,* the Father and the Son both concur in the *plan*, and are animated with the same sentiments. But while I do not dispute that some of them may so satisfy themselves, yet the practical tendency of the doctrine is what we have asserted. And surely we are as much entitled to characterise it from such tendency, as the Protestants were to characterise the doctrines and practices of the Romish Church, as being derogatory to the dignity and atonement of Christ; in the face of a denial by the more enlightened Papists, that they ever had any idea of setting up other mediators or atonements to the prejudice of Christ's.

In the judgment of charity, we must admit the explanation of individuals, respecting their own motives and views, in both of these cases; but in both we are also and equally entitled, to mark the obvious tendency and character of the doctrine.

This tendency was sufficiently distressing to the mind

* The use which I here make (and in other places) of the term *evangelical* in a *sectarian* sense, may be obnoxious on the first sound, not only to the party designated, but also to others who have a respect for the term in its original and etymological meaning; but since a certain party *will assume it* in a sense peculiar to themselves, let them take it; only let us always think of it in the same sense, in speaking of or to them. Thus, a certain sect assumed the designation of Jesuits. Nothing could be more respectable in its original and etymological meaning; but when it came to be defined by the opinions and conduct of the party, it was valued only at its worth in that view. It is thus I would use the term "Evangelical."

of the pious worshipper, by distracting his attention to different objects, and confusing his ideas; but it did not end here, for being combined with the doctrine of the atonement, as explained by the new ideas of a Covenant, it moulded Christianity at length completely to the model of Judaism—not indeed in *form*, as the Judaising teachers of the apostolic age literally attempted, and as the Church of Rome virtually effected—but in *spirit*. It represented the Deity, or the complex Godhead, in the aspect of a hard master difficult to be placated, or rather refusing to show mercy in any case or degree, without the intervention of a penal sacrifice and compensation. The Calvinistic atonement, indeed, was different from the Jewish; but the demand for it was grounded upon the same principle, and its *necessity* regarded as equally peremptory. Instead of an external ritual, as among the Jews, there was an internal discipline of thoughts required by the new theology, to produce the same moral sentiment in the worshipper—namely, a slavish awe and fear of God, as of a being in the highest degree jealous and vindictive towards all who would not comply with an arbitrary arrangement, and confess the reasonableness of it.

This logical discipline of the mind, under the doctrine of the Covenants, was even more slavish than that of the Jew under his ceremonies; for the Jews might believe, and many of them evidently did believe, that their sacrifices were merely visible tokens to *assure them* of the merciful character of God. The Jewish system involved no dogmas forcing men to believe that its ceremonies were the result of an abstract disposition and determination on the part of the Deity, *in no case to show mercy without satisfaction*, in suffering or value.

On the contrary, the Prophets laboured to divest the Israelites of any such notion, by teaching, that mercy, obedience, and contrition, were *better* than sacrifices, and more acceptable to God. But the doctrine of the Covenant teaches, that, comparatively with the blood of Christ

and his imputed righteousness, the best morality is of *no value*, and is absolutely disregarded in the matter of justification.

To many minds it appears, that the clear inference from the Evangelical doctrine of sacrifice is, that God is *not* spontaneously merciful nor reasonable, in his dealings with his rational offspring; but must be moved to compassion, and even to what men would, in many instances, esteem common equity, by an *external motive*—by a payment of debt or amount of suffering, equivalent to the punishments denounced by a most rigorous, not to say unjust law. And even where the mind revolts from the admission of this inference in its naked form, the gloomy tendency of the doctrine cannot be entirely shaken off.

The doctrine of the Covenant (we affirm) has still the tendency to produce an effect, precisely of the same kind with the ceremonies of the law of Moses in their popular or literal aspect. This effect is directly opposed to that of the peculiar doctrine of Christianity—its benevolent morality—and also to the liberal spirit of its worship and piety, consisting of a filial confidence and affection, in place of the spirit of slavery and of fear.

I think no unprejudiced person can deny that the doctrine has apparently this tendency; and those who are acquainted with the religious world, know that in point of fact, it frequently if not generally, produces such effect upon those who are seriously influenced by the belief of it. Some, indeed, contrive to counteract this tendency by opposite and more cheerful views of the divine character; but they have a difficulty in accomplishing it. Their feelings are confused and vacillatory, and they spend their lives in a wearisome struggle between the influence of their system and the force of truth. On a future occasion, I will anatomise and exhibit this *experience*, as they call it; but for the present, let us inquire how men who have given unquestionable proof of the sincerity of their religion have been deluded on this subject. It is, no doubt, be-

cause they have persuaded themselves that they had the authority of inspired Scripture for their notions.

Now let us see what Scriptural grounds the Protestants had for their peculiar doctrine of the Covenant, and other doctrines founded on it. It cannot be pretended, that we have accounts of any conversations which passed between Adam and his Maker, or between the persons of the Trinity on the subject. The accounts given by theologians, are in their letter purely fanciful or theoretical, and the spirit of them is supported only by a very slender and detached number of texts. The chief ground on which these doctrines rest, appears to be, an idea that the Mosaic institution was a type or sample of the general plan on which the moral government of the world was conducted—that his Law was (with the addition of some peculiar national ceremonies) an edition of a general moral law, to which all men were subject. But this the Protestant theologians merely assumed, and we may deny it.

We had occasion already to observe, that the Law of Moses had a peculiar character. It was one of unbending severity, admitting of no mercy, and of no plea of extenuation in favour of offenders. It was only through the collateral institute of sacrifices, that offences against it could be forgiven or punishment mitigated. In these respects, it was a Law suited to the times, and to the people—to an early stage of society, and to a people in peculiar circumstances. It did not rest upon any general principle of morality recognised either by the reason of man, or enjoined by the authority of God. The whole principle of the Mosaic Law was arbitrary, or rested solely on authority. We do not mean, that many precepts of intrinsic obligation were not embodied in it; but we mean that all which was peculiar and characteristic in it was arbitrary—and this character of severity, among other things. There were reasons for it, indeed, but these reasons were of a local and temporary nature, and therefore no inference is to be drawn from them, regarding the

general principles upon which the moral government of God was conducted.

It cannot be pretended, from any natural sense of justice, or from any deduction of sound reasoning, that a debt should in no case be remitted, and an offence in no instance be forgiven; ay, even although the debtor was unquestionably poor, and insolvent; and although the offence might have been unconscious, as in the case of children unborn, or infants—unintentional or unpremeditated in some instances—mitigated by circumstances or followed by repentance in others. There is no such natural law as this. It is a monstrous fiction.

In the Calvinistic theology, however, such a law is always presumed to have an abstract and positive existence, and to precede the machinery of mercy, and thus rendering such machinery necessary. The laws of Moses, all imperfect as they were, were not so bad as this; for their severe penalties and their merciful remissions were collateral and co-existent—equally portions of the same code.

The truth is, that in the whole system of revealed religion, this maxim is prominent, “that unto whom much is given, of them the more shall be required.” A stricter ceremonial and a more lofty morality were required, therefore, respectively of the Jews and of the Christians, *because* they were a chosen people, nearer than the rest of mankind to the “grace of God,” possessing the knowledge and the means of doing his will, and of obtaining his mercy and favour. In this view, the Law of Moses was not grounded on such a principle of severity as the Calvinistic moral law; and even if it had, it does not follow that such was the general principle of the divine government, that is to say, of *the true moral law*.

But it may be said, that the Apostle Paul draws such an analogy between the two. I deny it. His *arguments* on this subject are strictly *argumenta ad homines* to Jews and to Jewish proselytes. When he says to them, there-

fore, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book, to do them"—he speaks of the law of Moses, from which these words are a quotation, and of nothing else. He does, indeed, assert also, that as the Jews were condemned by the law of Moses, because no man could perfectly keep its precepts; so were the Gentiles, in like manner, condemned by the law of nature or of their consciences, when they did not act in conformity to it. True, all men are sinners and ought to plead for the divine mercy; but that is not the question; the question is, will God in judging mankind, *impute* to them the sin of Adam—the sins (or want of conformity to any strict and abstract view of right) committed in their infancy—the sins of their ignorance, of their misfortunes—the sins that are repented of and bewailed—the sins that are forsaken, and the evil habits that are amended: shall the Judge of all the earth do this, merely because he put the Israelites under a peculiar system of government? No such thing. It is written, that "the times of ignorance God winketh at;" and again, "if I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; if I had not done among them the works which no other man had done, they had not had sin; but now they have *no excuse*." "For this is the condemnation, that light came into the world, and they have chosen darkness instead of light."

It does not suit my design to enter into any critical examination of all the passages of Paul's Epistles, which are usually quoted on this subject, nor indeed to discuss any theological controversy in detail. It is enough that I point out general views connected with our main argument, in order to show how the moral sentiments of mankind are affected by them. I have adverted to the prejudice grounded upon Paul's alleged authority, and raised up as an objection. If what we have said on that point be not considered sufficient, there is another remark which should be conclusive. Supposing that there could be

some passages culled from Paul's Epistles, which appeared favourable to the doctrine of the Covenants; whether are we to regard these as the prejudices of a Jew, viewing the subject through medium of national or personal habits of thinking; or are we to regard them as inspired instructions, *supplementary* to those of Christ his master?

It cannot be denied that the doctrine of the Covenants is either a different thing, or presents the matter in a very different point of view from what we meet with, concerning the character of God in the moral doctrine of Christ. Which of these, therefore, are we to regard as of greatest authority or importance? Which the more clear or obscure? Which of them must yield to and be interpreted by the other? In *theory*, few professing Christians will be hardy enough to suppose, that Paul in this respect was greater than his Master, or had in fact a new and distinct mission; but *practically*, such a sentiment did prevail with the early Protestants, and still prevails among many Christians.

Let such persons, however, reflect, that the Gospels (containing the words of Christ) are professedly the records of the Christian doctrine. The Epistles only treat of certain points incidentally. The Gospels are addressed to all mankind. The Epistles were addressed to particular churches, and are full of matter interesting only to those churches. The matter of the Gospels, was published from the beginning, and formed the harmonious testimony of *all* the apostles and disciples. The occasion and subject of the Epistles, arose accidentally after a lapse of about thirty years; and so far as we know, were never taken up by the other apostles and disciples generally. Peter says, that in them, there were some things hard to be understood, and James appears to contradict Paul in certain of his dogmas.

Christ expressly asserts, "that *the words* which he spoke were from God," and he demanded implicit submission to them. Paul speaks "as unto wise men, who

should *judge* what he said," and in the way of *exhortation* to those who, "he was persuaded, were already filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish each other." Christ spake "with authority"—"he that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—"verily, verily, I say unto you," &c. Paul *argued* on facts and principles, known to and admitted by his opponents, therefore on terms of equality with them.

We shall say no more on this point for the present, hoping that what we have said is sufficient for our immediate purpose; and that is, to show, that while the Reformers stopped at and engrossed themselves with Paul's arguments and views, as developed in his Epistles, they failed to go to the fountain-head of our Lord's personal teaching; and for that reason, they never attained to the sublime and peculiar doctrines of Christianity—a benevolent Deity, and a benevolent morality. They rested in a refined and metaphysical Judaism, which as compared with the gross superstition to which the Church of Rome had arrived, was certainly a great Reformation, but far from being a complete return to the genuine doctrines of the Gospel.

CHAPTER III.

THE correctness of our analytical view of the doctrines of the Reformation, is confirmed by the practical effects of them. In so far as the Reformers appealed to the general rights of humanity, and claimed the liberty of conscience, in forming and following their own religious opinions, it is clear that they should have acted upon the principle of a perfect toleration or personal liberty. And if they had duly respected the precepts of the Christian morality, "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you"—"Judge not that ye be not judged"—

“Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,” &c.; they would have yielded to others what they demanded for themselves—the right of worshipping God as they pleased, and of interpreting the Scriptures according to their individual judgment. But they did not so act. They persecuted those who differed in matters of opinion from themselves, and thus showed the preference they gave to a metaphysical dogma, over a moral precept.

This was particularly the case when any persons dared to carry their views farther than they themselves had chosen to do, in the way of departing from the Catholic faith. They assumed that infallibility which they had denied to the Pope; and they imitated him by enforcing their decisions with rigorous penalties. In one point, indeed, they scrupled to go the length of the Romish Inquisition, *viz.* in shedding blood, and in this they imitated the practice of the Church in earlier times, and adopted the sentiments of Augustine, who, in all points, was esteemed an oracle by the Protestants. *He* would not consent to the shedding of blood; but he had no objections to banishment, stripes, or imprisonment; and “the truth is (he says) that though it is an unjust persecution which the wicked make on the Church, yet it is a just thing on the part of the Church to persecute; for the wicked do it of rage, but she doeth it in love, that she may recal or free men from their error.”

It is impossible, says the historian from whom I quote this passage (Cook’s View) “to conceive delusion and perversion of understanding greater than this—or to wish for a more lamentable and decided proof of the tendency of persecution, to destroy every right moral feeling, and to convert the love inculcated by the Gospel into the most deadly hatred, and into a scourge of humanity.”

We have said that the Reformers imitated Augustine in this as in other things. Thus, Luther expressing his abhorrence to the shedding the blood of heretics, says in one place, “it is sufficient to banish them;” but in ano-

ther place, he goes farther and affirms, “that they ought to be confined and put under restraint as madmen”—a mode of proceeding, which, it is needless to say, would often be worse than death. Calvin also professed to lament that sentence of death had been actually executed against Servetus, although he himself had been the means of casting him into prison and bringing him to trial. In the same manner, the Synod of Dort were content, in their mercy towards the Arminians, with depriving them, first, of all civil and ecclesiastical employments; and when that would not do, they were sentenced to imprisonment, to ruinous exactions, to exile, and to every mark of ignominy which could be stamped upon the most worthless of mankind! And the victims of such persecutors, be it remembered, such as Socinus, Servetus, Arminius, and their followers, were frequently men of the most unquestionable piety and virtue, in all other respects except that of reputed heresy—that is to say, of differing in some matter of opinion from the majority of the Reformers.

But although the extremity of shedding blood was disavowed by the most eminent Reformers, this did not altogether prevent the practice. Servetus, already mentioned, was consumed in the flames at Geneva. Cranmer caused several heretics to be executed in England. And in the contentions between the Episcopalians and Presbyterians in Scotland, multitudes were murdered in cold blood, for the sole reason that they would not submit to each other's religious opinions and ordinances. Besides these, all the civil wars of those unhappy times, were incited and coloured by religious bigotry.

In process of time, this persecuting spirit was however subdued, by the silent working of those moral principles of Christianity, which have never ceased to improve mankind in spite of their theological feuds; and this took place in Catholic as well as in Protestant countries; because the regenerating influence was independent of the peculiar doctrines of either. Yet, in so far as the root of

the evil existed, namely, the preference of metaphysical dogmas over moral sentiments, it remained the source of rancorous party spirit, and of various sorts of indirect persecution, and continues so to this day.

The only excuse for our forefathers in these matters, is, that such was the spirit of the age in which they lived. Most true; but that is the very reason why we should cease to pay a blind veneration to their memory, and why we should open our eyes to the connection which subsisted between their principles and their conduct. The spirit of the age was indeed intolerant; but there must have been a cause why it continued so, under a forward movement, which was, in many other instances, good; and the reason we think, was this, that the Reformation which the Protestants thought they had made on the doctrine of the Atonement and its appendages, was merely nominal. It was divested of its grosser forms, but it retained all its old spirit. It was still opposed to the benevolent principles of the Gospel, and it brought forth its proper fruits—distrust in the goodness of God—ensoriousness and severity towards man. It neither gave “glory to God on high, nor peace and good will among men.”

Men who think God will have no mercy, do not themselves show mercy. They imitate the character which they ascribe to their Maker; and because they think that he is determined to punish all alleged heretics with eternal fire, they may commence the process by temporal fire and punishments. It is thus that God gives up theoretical errors to be associated with some palpable delusion or another, that men seeing the practical fruit of the doctrine, may learn what to think of the principles which produced it.

We are authorised to make such a remark on the character of the Reformation, so far as it was intolerant. That this characteristic was not peculiar to it, but belonged rather to the *spirit of the age*, we admit; but the conclusion is, that in this respect the Reformers did not escape

that spirit by the change of their doctrine, and therefore their doctrine was defective. In one respect, the new doctrine even enlarged the range of intolerance, as we have said, by reviving certain old theological controversies which had gone to sleep.

It was an accidental advantage attending the universal obedience paid to the Pope, that it preserved a unity of doctrine throughout all Christendom; and, consequently, the clergy had no occasion, in their public instructions, to distract the attention of the people, and to puzzle their minds with a strife of words and metaphysical definitions. In Catholic countries, even yet, the sermons or practical exhortations from the pulpit, are grounded on principles of religion and morality, which are assumed as being *well known and admitted by the audience*. In this part of their services, at least, there is no assumed mystery—no recondite doctrine, which it was supposed only a few understood, and the evidence of which required to be logically deduced and defended continually, in order to catch, if possible, the attention or approbation of a quibbling audience.

Among the Protestants, on the contrary, the people are either supposed to be ignorant of or to be torpid to the impressions of orthodoxy, unless when awakened by the glimpses of it caught at those regular displays; or, if the audience are assumed to be already initiated, they must then be soothed and kept steadfast in the metaphysical discipline of their thoughts and logical concatenation of their duties, by a constant rotation of controversial argument and definitions. I do not mean that the Roman Catholic services, taken altogether with their mummary of ceremonies, invocations, and intercessions, are to be preferred to the Protestant; but I mean, that they differ in this respect, that the objects of faith and duty with the Catholic being *uniform*, the worshipper is neither distracted nor discouraged by any thing else than the sense of his personal wants or demerits; but the Protestant is

assailed by the divers views of contending sects and opinions. If he be of weak mind, he is apt to be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. If he be of strong mind, he is practically disgusted with the constant wranglings of a scholastic theology, and by the constrained forms into which the simplest matters of duty or of devotion are moulded, by the carping taste and varying orthodoxy of its theologians.

I have known a parish, after having been under the spiritual guidance of a clergyman of one school of theology, turned over by his death to the instruction of another of quite opposite doctrines, and the sentiments of the people totally disturbed or reversed in consequence. Nay, I have seen in a collegiate charge, two ministers regularly attacking the doctrines and undermining the influence of each other; and thus dividing the flock into two hostile parties.

The same cause is apt to debase the piety and religion of individuals, even in their private devotions, by the impression that they can only make themselves acceptable to God by speaking to, and thinking of him, according to the strict rules and terms of their theological system, "as if God the Father were a school-divine;" and as if devotion were a logical and metaphysical *exercise*, which he had imposed as a *task* upon his scholars.

The candid and intelligent reader will not suppose that this sketch is given as a description of all Protestants individually, or even of all parties in the present day; but it describes a certain spirit which has prevailed, to a greater or less degree, among them as a body, especially in former times. Such spirit was the fruit of that controversial disposition which was characteristic of the Reformation, and of its first and most eminent leaders.

This fact, which cannot be questioned, has however been excused, by saying, that controversy is the natural consequence of *liberty*, and cannot be helped. This, however, I deny. Controversy is the consequence of attempting to *define things over nicely*; and of attaching an im-

portance to such definitions which they do not merit. In the first century, when the *liberty* of Christians in that respect was greatest, there was almost perfect peace. When we see the church divided, therefore, into opposite and hostile sects, we may be sure there is something wrong. The error lay in this, that the Reformers, while they *professed* to appeal to the Bible as the only foundation of their system—they in point of fact only fell back on the age of Augustine and of Athanasius, and *adopted their ideas*. They did not ascend to the precepts of their Master, after the example of the first generation of Christians; and that generation lived in peace, because they were content with the Gospels as *their only rule of faith and manners*.

We say, the Reformers took Athanasius, and more particularly Augustine, as their interpreters of the Scripture; for, nominally, they did appeal to the Old Testament and to St. Paul—yes, I say, to Moses and to Paul, for as to the personal history and doctrine of Christ, they looked at it constantly and solely through the spectacles of Moses' Law and Paul's Epistles. Nay, the Reformers and many of their disciples, animated by the same feeling on this head, were scarcely satisfied with the orthodoxy even of their favourite Augustine and other early Fathers; because they did not entirely merge the Gospel of Christ into the legal and technical terms and forms used by Paul in his controversy with the Judaising teachers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE assertion with which we closed our last chapter, may seem harsh; but it can be easily proved. Thus, Milner (in his Church History) says, "That none of the Apostles seem to have understood, so much as Paul, the riches of divine grace, and the peculiar glory of the Christian re-

ligion—the doctrines of *election*, *justification*, regeneration, the *atonement*, the Holy Spirit,” &c. He insinuates afterwards, that these peculiar doctrines (which I have marked by Italics), and which formed the special topics of the Protestant divinity, were very early lost sight of by the Fathers, and comparatively little known or understood till the days of Augustine. “Even Justin Martyr (he says) in the second century *adulterated* the Gospel, particularly by his doctrine of *free-will*. * * * Tatian his scholar went bolder lengths, and *deserved* the name of heretic. * * * It is easy to notice, that Irenæus’ views of the Gospel are the same with those of Justin. Like him, he is silent on the doctrine of *election*; like him, he defends the Arminian notion of *free-will*.” Of Augustine he says, “that the precise and accurate notion of *justification*, seems not to have been understood even by that holy man. He perpetually understands the term as descriptive of *inherent* righteousness or sanctification—not as pointing to *imputed* righteousness.” Our historian makes the same complaint of Fulgentius in the 6th century, and adds, “*that the true idea of the word (justification) seems to have been lost in the Church from the time of Paul to Luther.*” In the same spirit, and speaking of Bernard (in the twelfth century, otherwise one of his favourites), he complains, “that in a certain description of love, there was a great defect, as was common to the age, namely, in a want of a distinct and orderly description of the *faith* (the Calvinistic view of it) of the Gospel, which alone can work the love in question.”

In addition to these extracts, I may remark, that in describing the conversions of Cyprian and Augustine, as given in their own confessions and memoirs, Milner is evidently dissatisfied that they should have dwelt so much upon the *moral* changes which took place in their habits and character, and so little upon those metaphysical and mystic changes of *views* and *feelings*, by which modern conversions are chiefly distinguished among that class of

Christians to which he belongs. But our historian is satisfied, that Luther fully entered into what he regards as the spirit of *Paul's theology*. Luther was not, indeed, so special in his attention, and so precise in his definitions about *election*, as Calvin and his followers were afterwards; but in regard to the doctrine of justification, these two Reformers, and all others of the sixteenth century, were perfectly at one. And according to Luther's famous maxim, this doctrine of justification, in the light they viewed it, was indeed the very corner-stone of the Protestant theology—"articula stantis vel cadentis ecclesiæ."

This maxim involved three things. First; it was opposed to the Romish doctrine of the *merit* of saints, of ceremonies, and specially of the mass, in procuring the forgiveness of sin. Second; it had a respect to the doctrine of the atonement and the covenants, as the only legitimate grounds of hope toward God, in contrast to all direct views of the benevolence and mercy of God. Third; it had a respect to the *faith* of such doctrine, as the only *means* on the part of man, to be used for obtaining the favour of justification, in contrast to morality of every description, as far as they understood the term; for in reality, they had never considered the subject of what *we* have described as the proper Christian morality.

With regard to the first bearing of Luther's doctrine of justification, we have nothing to say against it. It was the truth, and by it he prevailed. With regard to the other bearings of it, we have said of the same doctrine, under the term of atonement, that it was a Jewish idea, destined to be superseded by the doctrine of the Christian Morality; and for want of understanding this, Luther and his followers plunged themselves into a maze of contradictions and disputes, which were attended with the most lamentable consequences, and which may prove to all candid minds, that such fruits could never be the produce of the "tree of life."

It were tedious to give a detailed sketch of historical

facts in evidence of this remark. I refer my readers to that part of Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, in which he gives a copious detail of the rise and progress of those disputes in the bosom of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. The truth is, that after the final separation from the Church of Rome, such topics occupy the entire Protestant history. We have no accounts in such history of any amelioration in the state of society—of any improvement in morals, of any advance in useful knowledge—as connected with or arising directly out of the Protestant theology, beyond the first abandonment of the Popish superstitions and slavery. On that point, and others flowing from it, we are always happy to acknowledge the benefits of the Reformation. But in other respects, its history, so long as its original impulses continued to influence society, presents nothing but scenes of perpetual warfare, with the swords or with the pens—with the tongues or with the passions of mankind. Our historian himself, although evidently partial to the Protestant cause, and specially to the Lutheran church, cannot refrain at times from breaking out in strains of indignation and contempt at the melancholy exhibition. I will content myself with a few of these passages, and would again refer the reader, who is any way sceptical about my assertion, to study the third and fourth volumes of Mosheim, with a view to ascertain the truth in this matter.

“ All the (Lutheran) divines of the sixteenth century (says Mosheim) were educated in the school of controversy, and so trained up to war, that an eminent theologian, and a bold and vehement disputant, were synonymous terms. * * * The spirit that animated the Lutheran divines was, generally speaking, far from being tempered with charity, except in the case of Melancthon. Luther himself may be placed at the head of this testy tribe, for he surpassed the most of them in invective and abuse; treating his adversaries with the most brutal asperity, and sparing none, however respectable they might be. * * *

The philosophy of Aristotle was taught at this time, in almost all the seminaries of learning; and applied to the regions of theology, rendered them barren, thorny, intricate, and gloomy, by the enormous multitude of barbarous terms, captious questions, minute distinctions, and useless subtleties, that followed in its train. * * * The progress of Morality among the Reformed, was obstructed by the very same means as among us (Lutherans). It was neglected amidst the tumult of controversy; and while every pen was drawn to maintain certain systems of doctrine, few or none were employed in that noblest of all sciences which has virtue, life, and manners for its objects. * * * In the seventeenth century, matters were little better; for during the greater part of it, the Aristotelian philosophy was still taught in the Lutheran schools, dressed up in that scholastic form that increased its native intricacy. * * * As to Morals, no writer of distinguished merit appeared; those who did apply themselves to the subject, confined themselves to *cases of conscience* in which their decisions were often erroneous and liable to constant mistakes. * * * Some improvements were attempted toward the latter end of the century, but they did not diffuse any such spirit of concord, as was sufficient to heal ancient divisions or prevent new ones. The Lutheran church, on the contrary, was involved in the most lamentable commotions and tumults during the whole course of the century; partly by the controversies that arose among its most eminent devotees, and partly by the zeal of violent reformers and fanatics. * * * Nor did the doctrines of Christianity, which had been so sadly disfigured among the Lutherans, by the obscure jargon and intricate tenets of the scholastic philosophy, meet with any better fate in the Reformed churches."

Now, let it be remembered, that all these disputes and uncertainties, and barrenness in the Protestant theology, sprang directly or indirectly from one common source, *viz.* the idea that there was some *mystery* about the terms and

means of human salvation; and this mystery was connected with the doctrines of atonement, covenants, justification, human depravity, liberty, necessity, &c. It was these doctrines and the supposed necessity of certain means, ordinances, and forms of religion, for acquiring the requisite *knowledge of the mystery*; it was these and such like things (I say), which formed the entire substance of all those controversies which were attended with such lamentable effects.

But these, and all their attendant strifes, and heart-burnings, and violence, would have been cut off at once by the simple doctrine of a benevolent Deity and a benevolent Morality; if it had been impressed on the minds of men with the same industry and zeal, as those unprofitable and mischievous controversies were.

CHAPTER V.

THE controversial doctrines of which we have been speaking, have been generally known under the title of *evangelical*; and in the 16th century, this title was nearly synonymous with that of *protestant*, at least the Protestants wished to claim the doctrines in question as peculiarly *their own*. In this they were not indeed fully justified; but their claim to this peculiar designation of *evangelical*, in the sense they understood it, stamped that distinct character on their theology which we have endeavoured to delineate. In process of time, however, and by that general march of the human mind to which we have frequently adverted, several persons and public bodies among the Protestant Christians, began to escape from the trammels of the scholastic theology, to assert their liberty of thought upon such matters, and to carry the spirit of Reformation farther than was permitted by its leaders in the 16th century. It will now be our

business to trace the nature and effects of such progress, and in doing this I propose to arrange the separate impulses or movements into different classes, and to treat of them under their respective heads, without adhering always to the exact chronological sequence of events.

Before proceeding in this investigation, however, it will be useful to digress a little from the general line of our argument, and to look back to a certain original mistake, which affected all the controversies of the Christian theology; and to which it is necessary to attend, before we can understand the progress and issue of those movements of the public mind (to which I refer), in receding from the long usurped authority of the church and of the schools of philosophy.

We have already remarked *one* prolific source of errors and disputes originating even in the first century, and running through all the succeeding ages; namely, a false idea of the nature and use of atonements. A *second* thing (of which we are about to speak) had its origin as early, and was co-equal and co-lateral with the first in its influences, although the train of our argument and historical sketches did not lead us to advert to it sooner.

It was this: “that the doctrine of the Church—that is to say, of the *majority* of Christians, was supposed *infallible*, and might be imposed upon the *minority* or dissentients, under the penalty of the Divine displeasure and punishments of a future state.” It was this idea of the Church possessing the power of inventing or defining dogmas of theology, and of imposing them on the consciences of men—it was this, which made Christians submit implicitly to the doctrines of Augustine, of Athanasius, and others, who had influence enough to get their opinions sanctioned by general councils.

Although this was a palpable submission to “the commandments and traditions of men” instead of the word of

God, yet it is astonishing how far all denominations of Christians were imposed upon by the delusion. Those who happened to find themselves in the minority, and consequently to be called heretics and heterodox, did indeed oppose such claims as made by their opponents; but they still admitted the principle, by claiming it for themselves. They were in their own eyes "the only true church," and they would exercise the supposed *prerogative* of that church. The grounds of a prejudice so deep rooted, and so extensive in its influence, requires to be investigated, in order that we may ascertain how far the Reformers of the 16th century, and of those who follow them, succeeded in getting quit of the prejudice, and in arriving at the true ground on which the authority of Christian doctrine should rest.

The origin of this prejudice seems to have arisen out of a peculiarity in the condition of the church during the first generation, which has not been sufficiently attended to, and to which I now beg the attention of my reader. The peculiarity to which I refer was this, that its doctrine was entirely derived at first from the *verbal teaching*, or the testimony, of a host of witnesses who had statedly or occasionally attended the personal ministry of Christ. This privilege was not enjoyed by the twelve Apostles only, but by the seventy disciples, and by many others. So far, indeed, as regarded the repetition of our Lord's discourses and precepts, or the story of his actions and sufferings, it required no *official appointment* on the part of any disciple, to make such things known to the world. In so doing, they simply declared or testified to matter of fact, of which they either had personal knowledge themselves, or of which they had received the account from credible witnesses. It was in this manner that the doctrine of Christianity was propagated during the first generation, and this doctrine so preserved and promulgated, was called the *tradition* of the Church. It was not committed to writing by the four Evangelists for a great number of

years; and even then, from the difficulty of multiplying manuscripts, and the incapacity of the body of the people to read, the mode of teaching by *tradition* was continued.

Now it is obvious from the nature and origin of this traditional doctrine, that it must have been *the same* in all countries where the Gospel was preached by the first race of witnesses. It did not consist of any speculations or opinions of those who propagated it—it consisted entirely of what Jesus had *done* and *taught*, and therefore the witnesses being honest, they would all tell the same story. They had no temptation to do otherwise, and if any one had attempted it, he would have been instantly refuted by the host of other witnesses who had been scattered abroad by the persecution in Judea, or who had, during our Lord's ministry, repaired from all quarters of the world to the festivals at Jerusalem.

By such means, therefore, the Christian doctrine for the first century, and even for sometime longer, was *uniform*; and the early Fathers boast of this, and appeal to it constantly, as an irrefragable answer against all the new-fangled conceits which the Gnostics attempted to introduce into the Church.

The origin of *their* fancies could always be traced to some particular place or person; they were unknown and unheard of in other churches, and *therefore* such fancies were condemned as groundless. They formed no part of the *universal tradition*. In such circumstances, the doctrine of the *majority* was necessarily *the true doctrine*; and hence the importance attached to it and expressed in that clause of the very ancient creed, commonly called the Apostles'—"I believe in, or (simply) believe, the holy Catholic Church;" that is, I believe in the authority and truth of what she teacheth—in which respect she was "the pillar and ground of truth" to the primitive Christians.

Thus it was, that in those times, what was believed and taught among the generality or majority of Christians,

must certainly have been the doctrine of their Master. What was taught by a few only, must have been their own invention, or at best their private inferences and opinions. The reasons for this, however, were entirely temporary and peculiar. When the first generation of Witnesses passed away, the succeeding generation of Christians had only the *tradition* at second hand, and so on of others who followed. But it is in the very nature of tradition to be corrupted and to become uncertain in the lapse of ages, and hence the necessity of having it reduced to writing while the original witnesses were yet alive. This was done accordingly, under the guidance of Providence, by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and from that time forward, it is evident that *their writings* became the authentic deposit of the *original tradition*; and in the event of any question of doctrine being raised, the Gospels stood precisely in the place of the primitive Catholic Church, and became the only arbiter of the truth and antiquity of such doctrine.

It was by overlooking this circumstance, that the Church in after times still claimed the prerogative of the primitive Church. The general councils of the fourth and fifth centuries assumed, that they had succeeded to the *prerogative* of the *primitive* Church, in determining what was the true doctrine taught by Christ. But the considerations above mentioned, show clearly how groundless this pretence was; for the history and doctrine of Christ having been once recorded by the Evangelists, these councils had access to no means of information to be put on a level with *theirs*.

A second ground of claim was indeed afterwards invented. It was pretended that the Holy Spirit was promised to the Church *collectively* to guard it against error for all ages to come, and therefore whatever she decided to be orthodox doctrine, was only such. In this view, a maxim became prevalent, "that heresies as they arose, gave the Church an opportunity of evol-

ing her doctrine more completely and precisely;" and as a consequence of this, it was assumed that the dogmas proclaimed by general councils were the dictates of such inspiration. This prerogative was specially and openly asserted by the Church of Rome, after she assumed a pre-eminence over all others; but she could not so easily have made out the pretence, if it had not been apparently in accordance with what really had been a prerogative of the Catholic Church in the first age. The ignorant people were bamboozled by this sophism; "the primitive Catholic Church was the depository and arbiter of Christian doctrine; therefore the Roman Church, which calls herself Catholic, has the same prerogative." With regard to this alleged inspiration of the Church *collectively*, whether in general councils or by the See of Rome as its supposed head; the futility of it, has been made sufficiently manifest by the fruits of it. The controversies, and contradictions, and vices of the Church, became too palpable for people of sense and candour to believe that it had been always inspired by a spirit of truth and holiness.

The Reformers, for this reason (among others), opposed the exclusive title of the Roman Church as dictator, and *nominally* appealed to the Bible as the only test of truth; but in so far as they *virtually* acknowledged the general councils of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, to have possessed the prerogative of determining the faith of the Church, they adopted and acted upon the same principle with the Papists. Besides, they did not perceive the inconvenience of appealing to *every part* of the Bible indiscriminately; for by taking the *whole Bible*, they mixed up Christianity with Jewish questions, instead of confining it to what had alone constituted the tradition of the primitive Church. The Gospels *alone* constituted that tradition.

There might be many things in the history and institutions of the Old Testament, or in the customs and opinions of the Jews in the time of our Saviour, (and it may

be of the Gentiles), which it might be interesting and useful to know; but none of all these things formed any part of that doctrine or tradition, which had been communicated to the Church, as above related; and which formed the only standard and authority to which Christians of the first age appealed. It was not the opinions and customs of the Jews concerning which the first Christians testified, and of which they bore witness. It was the history, the doctrines, and the precepts of Jesus alone. The allusions of the Evangelists to Jewish matters, were merely incidental. Their doctrine did not require men to become disciples of Moses, in order to become disciples of Christ. Some of the Jewish converts, under the influence of their national prejudices, indeed, were inclined to assert this; but they were reproved, and their attempt condemned. In this point of view, it is not the *Bible* but the *Gospels* to which all appeal lies respecting what are the real and only doctrines of Christianity. The Reformers, in consequence of not attending to this truth, and also by assuming the authority of the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries to be identical and equivalent to that of the first century, were led astray into narrow conceptions and interminable controversies.

I have thought it proper to digress a little from the general line of our remarks and argument, to advert to this point, and to fix attention upon it; the more especially, because, in our future discussion it will be shown, that the further movements of public opinion all tended to bring back the sentiments of Christians towards their primitive condition in this respect. Or rather, we should say, such movements were good, so far as they had such tendency; but in exact proportion as they stopped short of that conclusion, they proved defective. It is by applying this rule, that we shall be able to form a true judgment of the parties and events which will come under our notice.

CHAPTER VI.

WE return now, to the progress of public opinion and sentiment subsequent to the immediate influence of the first Reformers. The first effort (which we shall notice) to extend the liberty of thought and action, arose from objections taken to the doctrine of the Trinity, on the ground that it was only a definition, invented, or at least imposed upon the Church, in the fourth century, and without warrant from Scripture. The leader in this secession from the general doctrine of the Protestants, was Socinus. It is not our purpose to specify in detail his opinions, or those of his followers, neither to pass any judgment on them. We are not concerned with such things, otherwise than as they have a tendency to affect the moral sentiments of mankind; and in that respect, we regard every assertion of intellectual liberty against the authority of scholastic theology, as favourable to the cause of truth and humanity. In this view, at any rate, he was a useful Reformer. The age, however, was not prepared to follow either the example or peculiar opinions of Socinus. Except in Poland, where some previous circumstances had prepared the minds of a considerable number of persons to favour his doctrine, the Socinians were persecuted, and in the case of Servetus, even to the death. And in Poland itself, they at length lost the favour with which they were first regarded, and were suppressed or banished from the country. Similar opinions, however, were propagated after some lapse of time in England, by Whiston, Lardner, and others; and permanent Societies were at length established under the name of Unitarians, chiefly by the influence of Priestley. The struggles of the Unitarians in favour of religious liberty have been unquestionably favourable (as we have said) to the improvement of the intellectual and moral faculties; but unfortunately

the controversies in which they were involved, have in some cases narrowed their views of Christianity too much to mere points of theory; and in other instances extended them to verbal disputes and criticisms, which were foreign to its more essential and fundamental doctrines.

The doctrine of the Divine Unity is one of natural religion, and formed the proper object of the Jewish institution. In so far, it lies at the foundation of all religion; but when Christians had wandered from it, and are brought back to it again, they are only in the place where the prophets of Israel and some of the wiser of the heathen philosophers left them. Christianity has other matter for *its* proper object, although it involves that of the Divine Unity. The Unitarians, therefore, so far as they employ themselves exclusively in their public and associated efforts, to the demolition of the doctrine of the Trinity and some of its adjuncts, forget that when their work is done, they will only have removed certain rubbish which was accumulated in the dark ages. Christianity had its existence and its objects before the definitions of the scholastic theology were invented, and these demand our attention when such theology shall have passed away. It is of little consequence to clear away the ruins and rubbish of an edifice, unless we set about rebuilding and repairing it, that it may serve its original design. In fixing our views and attention to the doctrines of the Divine Unity, of natural justice, and of a future state simply; we do so far indeed coincide and co-operate with Christianity, and by resting our faith of these, upon the authority of her evidence, we may be in that respect Christians; but is this all that the Founder of Christianity required or expected?

Certainly not. In this manner, our conceptions of Christianity may be practically narrowed into a very meagre system. I do not mean that it is so individually on the minds of all professing Unitarians, for there are among them as among other sects, men distinguished by a more lofty piety and generous morality; but considered as

a corporate body, their good qualities have been rather negative than positive—their zeal more occupied with the exposure of old and decaying fallacies, than with the dissemination of renovating truths. They preach up good works no doubt, in opposition to those who say we shall be saved by faith only; but they have not studied the peculiar Christian Morality, more than other Christians;* and they are not aware of the advantage of confining the Christian doctrine exclusively to the Gospels, as its proper foundation and authority. While, therefore, we praise them as having made a further step in the progress of religious liberty and truth, beyond Luther and his coadjutors, they have likewise stopped short in the way.



A second movement was made to escape from the tyranny and trammels of the scholastic theology, by Arminius and his followers. They were chiefly instigated by a desire to oppose the opinions of Calvin and his partisans; and the doctrine of Arminianism has consequently a special reference to the points of controversy between these parties. Calvin had screwed up the doctrines of election and of justification by faith, to a pitch beyond even that of Augustine, and thereby reduced his theology to a form still more technical and dogmatic than that of the Fathers. Many Arminians, therefore, were contented with quoting passages from the Fathers (of which it was easy to find plenty), in support of their opinions and in condemnation of Calvinism; in which respect they still tacitly admitted the writers of the early centuries, to be the arbiters of the Christian doctrine. But even where the parties appealed to Scripture, they never doubted that the technical and dogmatic form of

* The Unitarians are at the same time generally Universalists, in which respect they preach up the doctrine of the Divine benevolence. How far Universalism affects the moral sentiments, will be inquired into under that head.

the subject, which had been introduced by Paul, in his controversies with the Jews and Judaising Christians, was an essential form of Christianity. In the discussion between the Calvinists and Arminians, therefore, the term *faith* and *works* were used in a *special* sense, which is never contemplated in the *Gospels*; and consequently the whole controversy was characterised by the peculiarities of a dialectic or scholastic dispute; in which there might be some truth, with much confusion and contradiction on both sides; while each party was prevented from regarding the matter in its true light, by the prevailing spirit of polemical controversy. The same remark holds true of the dispute about election and reprobation, or in other words, of liberty and necessity; but as *it* is confessedly an abstruse subject, and as it has been tacitly dropped in a great measure on both sides, we will confine our remarks to the controversy about *faith* and *works*.

The very mooting of this dispute, and thereby the calling into question the *authority* of Luther and Calvin, was beneficial, by enlarging the liberty and exciting the faculties of the human mind. It is never so much debased and deadened as when it lies prostrated before any human authority, whether it be theological, as in the case of Calvin or others, or philosophic as used to be, with regard to Aristotle's real or supposed doctrines. In this respect, the Arminian controversy marked a forward movement; but it was stopped in its progress by the false ground on which the dispute was rested.

It was always assumed by the Calvinists when they spoke of *faith*—that it was a faith in some peculiar dogmas, and more specially in the *atonement*; thereby supposing such things equivalent or rather *identical* with the facts of the Gospel. When they spoke of *works* also, it was in a limited and technical sense. It was the works of *the law*, that is to say, of the Mosaic Law, or any similar institution, including indeed the decalogue which

they were pleased to call *the* Moral Law. All their ideas of morality were stinted to such precepts and to ceremonial observances. Or if they extended their views as they did sometimes, to the internal government of the mind, as well as to the external regulation of the conduct (as enjoined by Christ in the cases of anger and lewdness), then this was done out of respect to the alleged *spirituality of the law*. Morality and law were still included by such theologians in the same category, and distinguished from faith and the Gospel. They had no idea of a morality modified or rather revealed peculiarly by the Gospel, and opposed to, or contrasted with, the ceremonies, and with the morality of the Mosaic Law—thus belonging in fact to the category of the Gospel, and extending its obligations not only to the mere relations of man to man, but likewise to our relation with God. The Calvinistic ideas of faith and works, were by this means alike technical and special. So also was their idea of *justification*. It was confined to the forgiveness of sin and the *imputation* of righteousness, in a supposed forensic meaning, all equally scholastic and artificial.

The Arminians saw some of the practical absurdities to which the Calvinistic doctrine led; but being partly confused in their ideas of the terms in question, *i. e.* of faith, works, laws, and justification, &c. partly imposed upon likewise by scholastic prejudices, they combated the Calvinists on their own ground of dialectic theology. And so far as Scripture was concerned, they could as easily find the apparent support of Scripture as the Calvinist.

The practical result of a controversy so conducted, was, that the Calvinists became attached to and distinguished by peculiar dogmas of *faith*, and the supposed means of cherishing the evidence and influence of this faith. The Arminians were attached to and distinguished by their zeal for such a stinted *morality* as was contemplated in this dispute. Each party believed that the things to which they were respectively attached, were the most important

things in religion; for neither of them denied abstractly, that faith and good works were each good in their place.

Both their views were partial, and such partial views and attachments were alike injurious to real Christianity. The zeal of the Calvinists for their *faith*, frequently degenerated into barren speculations, and that of the Arminians for their *good works*, into dry and meagre formalities. The error of both lay, in not reverting to the personal doctrine of Christ, in which an exalted piety and benevolent morality, are blended harmoniously together, and (if we may thus speak) so fused and amalgamated as to present no separate elements to view, to be matters of contrast and disputation. In the mouth of our Saviour, the exhortation to *believe in him*, evidently means to believe *all things* which he taught, and not *some special* dogma or dogmas. To *obey* him, was to keep those sayings and precepts which he declared to be the words and the will of his heavenly Father—of which we have a summary in the Sermon on the Mount—and which precepts are purposely contrasted with and set above all the works and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law, or of former times and systems.

For want of attention to this, the influence of the dialectic philosophy, or of the scholastic theology, still prevailed, and distorted every thing which was viewed through its medium. More generous and free sentiments, indeed, occasionally escaped the lips of the contending sects; and individuals of more noble spirit than their own creeds, redeemed their speculative errors, by their practical virtues and philanthropy.

It is necessary to bear this in mind—that I am speaking of the abstract spirit of the controversy. In this point of view, we remark, that “the good works” or “morality” to which a scholastic Arminian is devoted, has not undeservedly been called, “a dry morality.” I shall perhaps be able to convey this idea better to the minds of some readers, by an extract from a writer of great descriptive

genius, than I might do by prosecuting the train of argument in which we have been engaged. I must premise, however, that I do not agree with some of her illustrations and applications of the principle. It is the general idea alone which I wish to develope by quoting her. We shall afterwards show in what points it ought to be corrected.

“If religion consists only in morality, how is it superior to philosophy and reason? The Stoics knew almost as much as ourselves of austere self-denials; but there is something more in Christianity, even an enthusiasm that weds it with all the affections of the soul—the power of loving and sympathising. It is the most indulgent worship, by favouring the flight of our spirit toward heaven. What means the parable of the Prodigal Son, if not, that true love of God is preferred even to the most exact fulfilment of duty? He quitted the paternal roof; his brother remained beneath it; he had plunged into all the pleasures of the world; his brother had never for an instant broken the regularity of domestic life: but the wanderer returned in penitence; and the affectionate father received him with rejoicings! Ah! doubtless, among the mysteries of our nature, Love is all that is left us of our heavenly heritage. Our very virtues are too often the effects of our constitution or of circumstances, so that we are not sure of the secret impulse that directs us. But I ask my God to teach me to adore him. I feel the effects of my petition, by a salutary influence on my mind. Yet to sustain this disposition, I must maintain a constant intercourse with the Divinity. I must acquire daily habits, that have no connection with the interest of this life, but belong solely to the invisible world. For this purpose, even external objects are of great assistance to piety. The soul would flag, if music and the arts reanimated not that poetic genius, which is also the genius of religion. The vulgarst man, while he prays or suffers, and trusts in God, would express himself like Milton, Homer, Tasso, if edu-

cation had furnished him with words. There is, in truth, but two distinct classes of men in the world—those who feel enthusiasm, and those who deride it; all the rest is artificial. Among the one class, there may be persons who have not words to clothe their sentiments. Among the other, there may be persons who make use of specious words only to hide the sterility of their hearts; but as the stream gushed forth from the rock, at the command of heaven, even so gush forth all true feeling, true religion, true love. The pomp of our (Catholic) worship; those pictures of kneeling saints, whose looks express continued prayer; those statues placed on tombs, as if to awaken one day with the dead, and remind us that the dead shall revive; our churches with their lofty aisles—all are intimately connected with devout ideas. I love this splendid homage done by man to that which promises neither fortune nor power—which neither rewards nor punishes, save by the feeling it inspires. I feel respect for my kind, when I recognise something so disinterested. The very magnificence of religion cannot in this view be too much increased. Oh! how I love what would otherwise be a useless waste, were life nothing better than a career of toil for despicable gain! but if this earth is only our road to heaven, what can we do better than so to elevate our souls, that they shall feel the Infinite, the Invisible, the Eternal, in the midst of the limit that surround us? Jesus permitted a weak but repentant woman to steep his head in precious balm, saying to those who reproved her for want of economy, ‘Why trouble ye the woman? the poor ye have always, but me ye have not always.’ Alas! whatever is good or sublime on this earth, is ours but for the time; we have it not always. Age, infirmities, and death, soon sully the heavenly dew-drop that only rests on flowers. Let us then, dear friends, blend love, religion, genius, sunshine, odours, music, and poetry. There is no Atheism like cold selfish baseness. Christ has said, ‘where two or three are gathered together in my name,

I will be in the midst of them;’ and what, O God, is assembling in thy name, if we do not so, while enjoying the charms of nature, or contemplating those of truth; therein praising and thanking thee for our life and our faculties; above all, when other hearts created by thy hands, respond entirely to our own?”—(*De Stael's Corrinne.*)

In the above extract, the writer is pointing out sentiments which are indeed strictly *moral* in their origin and tendency, but which yet, in the common style of theological language, are distinguished from what is usually called *morality*. She mingles love, indeed, (perhaps sexual love in its more refined forms,) classical tastes, and religion, all in one mass. Still her remarks are just to a certain extent; and they are much more so when applied to the true and peculiar doctrine of Christianity. We find in Christianity an element of moral sentiment at the very first step, to which the Stoics and all the moralists of their school (and among them many nominal Christians,) were perfect strangers. The ancient Stoics had no conception of the paternal character and providence of the Deity. Their moral sentiments, therefore, had no reference to this relation between God and man.* But the Christian who is instructed to look to an invisible Father, is reminded at the same time that this Father is Lord of heaven and earth—“I thank thee (said Jesus), O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, who revealest thyself to babes”

* The Stoics and others of the ancient philosophers, had indeed the idea of a Supreme Being, and styled him the Father of God and men; but this idea of paternity, is only equivalent to that of a Creator of all things, to which reason finds itself compelled to have recourse in its speculations about the origin and dependence of nature. The philosophers were still ignorant or doubtful how the Supreme Being interested himself in the welfare of men—how far he was influenced by sympathies and affections similar to those of a human parent for his offspring. They did not understand his moral character, nor the benevolent tendency and design of his Providence towards men. It is such a clear conception of, and close connexion with the Divine Being, which we mean by the doctrine of his paternal character.

—to the penitent, the teachable, the candid. Here is a relation pointed out between the Lord of all, and the humblest of his intelligent offspring, giving rise to moral sentiments of the sublimest character—more exalted, more pure, more energetic and universal in their influence than all classical associations, than all colouring of imagination, than all partial and individual affections. It is, in other words, the Love of God, the first and greatest of all moral duties and principles. Of this, we have said, the Stoics of antiquity were ignorant, and the Christian moralists of their school are negligent. This is the idea we proposed to develope. We availed ourselves of the description of *De Stael*, to show that the meagre morality of the world and of formalists, is indeed defective in lofty and energetic sentiment; but her substitute for it, in absence of the true Christian view, is likewise defective.

As there are many people, however, especially in the literary world, satisfied with notions like hers, let us, in passing, examine her doctrine a little more particularly. The perception of its weakness or fallacies, will strengthen and illustrate the true doctrine of Christianity. The notion of religion and the love of God, presented in the foregoing quotation, consists chiefly of that sort of feeling which is excited on occasions by the music and ceremonies and solemnities of public worship.* We do not deny that these circumstances will assist the conception and support the feelings of devotion; but in so far as it depends upon such aids and excitements, it is a mere transitory and superficial sentiment. It dies with the occasion. It is not the fruit of intellectual and moral perceptions. It rests on the senses, and on the imagination, and partakes of their fluctuating and evanescent character.

* In justice to *M. De Stael*, we must observe, the sentiments of her heroine (whose words are quoted), are contrasted by another speaker in her drama, so that we cannot say they are properly and entirely her own; but this does not matter. They are sentiments which in one shape or other, prevail among a certain class of people.

But some people will deny the inferior character here ascribed to the influences of imagination. With them, the imagination, and its organ poetry, is the source of all that is refined and excellent in our feelings. They contrast these with the grosser ideas of vulgar life, and find nothing so charming as what is powerful in passion, romantic or picturesque in colouring or position. They are the people of enthusiasm, forsooth; and thousands of volumes are yearly written, to amuse their fancies and minister to their sensibilities. The rage of politicians for *news*, is not greater than the thirst of such sentimentalists for *novelties*. Novels, and poems, and dramas, occupy the most of their thoughts, conversation, and especially their reading. They live in an ideal world, and they bless their stars that they “are not like other people.” Even grave authors have thought, that in such a love of the ideal, we may trace an instinctive thirst for something better than the world usually affords, and infer from it that there must be an antitype in a future state to which those longings tend.

I admit that there is a certain ground for some such notions in the instinctive feelings of man, and it is the same instinct which teaches us to be dissatisfied in religion, with a “dry morality” consisting of the mere regularity of our conduct, in the common affairs and relations of life between man and man. But Christianity provides something more solid and excellent to gratify such moral instincts, than the dreams and colourings of imagination—something of which all men of every condition of life may be susceptible, and which may habitually govern their feelings and conduct. This is the love of God and of Man, as regards the affections of our heart—and “the excellent majesty of his kingdom”—as regards our understanding; and these furnish topics of contemplation, more gratifying even to the imagination, than the most splendid conceptions of human poetry.

Unfortunately, however, those sentiments of genuine religion and truth, have been so frequently lost in, or so

mixed up with, the idle dreams of an unbridled fancy, or so distorted by the sophisms of a captious logic, that they do not readily present themselves to the minds of many who would otherwise have a relish for their beauty and excellence. But when they are duly cherished, and expanded in all those kindly charities and finer feelings of humanity, that are opposed to selfishness—in all the elevated ideas which are exalted above sensuality; when they point forward to the triumph of truth and virtue even in this world—to the time when more than the imaginations of poets, concerning golden ages that were supposed *past*, shall be realised; when they rest with confidence as to the attainment, and with distinct and animated views as to the nature of that future life, where the principles of benevolence shall reign without competition and without alloy; finally, when the mind ascends, by these sentiments, to a clear idea of, and a conscious communion with, the Father of Spirits—the Universal Lord—we experience in such feelings, the sublimest joy, the purest tranquillity, the harmony of all our powers and faculties, moving in perfect accordance to the divine will and laws of its Creator.

To sum up our remarks on Arminianism, we have said, that, so far as it is a scholastic doctrine, opposed technically to Calvinism, or to other systems of theology, it is defective in sentiment, and, on that account, its votaries are apt to be contented with such a meagre morality, as may satisfy the requisites of decency or of custom; of law or of expedience. In this point of view, it appears, as we have affirmed, that while Arminianism did good by calling in question the authority of Luther and Calvin among the Protestants, and by exposing some of their fallacies, it failed as Socinianism did, by not resting its doctrine upon the proper foundation, and carrying it forward prominently to those principles and sentiments which distinguished the morality of Christ.

CHAPTER VII.

A THIRD movement among the Protestants, sprang from a certain perception of the errors of the scholastic theologians. The inconsistency of identifying Christianity with the topics of dispute among the schools, and of controversies among the sects, had all along struck the mind of some pious persons. They conceived religion to be something different from external forms and metaphysical dogmas, and regarded it as an *inward sentiment*. These were the Mystics, among whom were many persons of great worth; but many also who mingled their doctrines with the reveries of a wild imagination. This spirit, after the first ferment of controversy between the Romans and Protestants had subsided a little, began to display itself under modifications suited to the age. Among the Catholics, indeed, it underwent little change with the mystics; it is therefore with Protestant mysticism that we have to do.

The Protestant mystics appeared under various leaders and different denominations. Among them, the chief in Germany were the Pietists, and in England the Methodists. I confine my remarks particularly to the latter variety, because I am best acquainted with them; but it is easy to perceive that they are all one species, and therefore the outline of their character must be the same. Their general idea that religion is an inward sentiment, is, so far as it goes, incontrovertible; but when too exclusive attention is paid to this view, it leaves a great latitude for individuals to form very different and vague ideas on the subject. Men are the only witnesses of their own feelings; and if every excitement from religious subjects is to be deemed alike an instance of piety, the sentiment being wholly undefined, may be often grossly mistaken.

And accordingly it has been so. The excitement of

the imagination under the influence of music and eloquence, sometimes even of grosser stimulants—the hopes of heaven when the party fancies himself one of the *elect*, for whatever reason—the fear of hell when he regards himself as a *reprobate*, for reasons equally vague—the clearness of his views concerning his orthodoxy in opinion or feeling—the sympathy with other minds in a state of excitement—the want or the flow of animal spirits; these and similar causes, produce a variety of feeling in the minds of persons during their public or private devotions, and are regarded among the Methodists as evidence of religion; as cases of *experience*—in short, as proofs of *vital* Christianity. It is something internal and not external, and this seems to them, to agree with the maxim of Scripture, that the kingdom of God is *within* us.

It is easy to perceive, however, that all this class of feelings may exist, be nourished and trained to exercise, without having any tendency or effect in cherishing the sentiment of benevolence, either as it regards our ideas of the Divine character, or those of our duty and conduct toward man. I do not say, that the Methodists as individuals, are devoid of benevolence; many of them possess that quality, but others do not; it does not spring from their peculiar views, and those of them who possess it, derive it from another source. The discrimination of the nature and source of the different sentiments which may enter into the composition of the Methodistic character, would lead us to the more general topic of what is called *experience* by a certain class of Christians, and of which I have already promised a distinct anatomy or exhibition; but this is not yet the time for it. Meantime we content ourselves with remarking that the idea of religion being an inward sentiment, is just, and that a testimony to that effect, was useful to expose and counteract the deficiency of the Formalist and of the Solafidian;* and so far, that it

* The man who trusts to faith alone.

was a forward movement in the progress of the human mind; yet in respect that benevolence is not considered by them as the chief *sentiment* to which all others are subservient, and by which they must all be measured; the Methodists, like the previous class of Reformers, stopped short of the true mark.

Even that love of God, or rather of Christ, upon which they in some measure pique themselves, and which is much in their mouths, is only the result of *gratitude*—a selfish feeling for benefits received or expected. The Methodist loves God and Christ, on the grounds *that his sins are forgiven or will be forgiven* in a particular manner, while other men are left to perish. He thinks himself a *favourite*, and is grateful, perhaps proud of it. But he has little idea of those benevolent qualities, or generally of those moral and intellectual excellencies, for which the Deity is an object of love, for his own sake. We may well say of the principle of gratitude in the Methodists' case, what our Lord says upon another occasion, "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye; do not even publicans and sinners the same?" Nay, even brute beasts love those who feed and caress them. Gratitude is a mere animal quality. It does not involve any perception of the character of the benefactor, beyond the act of *favouritism* in which one is interested; neither does it necessarily make the favourite capable of, or desirous of imitating the benefactor even in similar deeds. But he who contemplates the Deity apart from motives of individual interest—who understands and esteems the benevolent character of God displayed in his moral government towards *all men*; this man's understanding is expanded and ennobled, and his heart is smitten with the desire of being "perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect." We do not condemn gratitude; it is good in its place; it may be a first spring of action—he would be worse than a beast who was not susceptible of it; but let us not exalt it as the basis of a system, on which to build exclusively

or chiefly the moral culture of intellectual beings. This the Methodist attempts, and there he fails.

The fourth movement within the Church, was that of the Quakers. They perceived in some measure the defects of the preceding ones, and in particular, how remote the prevailing ideas of Christianity were, from those held out in Christ's Sermon on the Mount. That discourse appears manifestly designed as a sort of formula of Christian doctrine, and therefore *in it* we ought specially to look for those principles which distinguish Christianity. The Quakers in this way paid a more special degree of attention to the real genius and principle of true religion, than had yet been done corporately by any denomination of the followers of Christ in modern times. They saw the importance of the doctrines of benevolence, and were influenced by them. But they were somewhat hindered in their study of these doctrines, by having adopted with them certain peculiarities of the ancient mystics.

Having thus come short of the true idea of Christianity at first, they afterwards adhered with the usual obstinacy of sects, to the identical ideas and manners of their fathers; so that, instead of going forward and keeping pace with, or in advance of the increasing light of the times, they became stationary. They even relapsed into some popular errors which the primitive Quakers had practically avoided; if they did not particularly condemn them. It gives me pain to find these faults with this most respectable denomination, whom I greatly esteem; but truth must be told, that it may ultimately prevail.

I have said that the Quakers fell into some of the errors of the more ancient mystics. One of these was, about personal inspiration and worship; or rather the mode in which this inspiration was to be expected, and the worship conducted. It was no peculiar doctrine of any sect of Christians, "that the aid of the Holy Spirit was proffered

and might be enjoyed for the *moral purposes* of instruction, of consolation, and of purity." A general although rather confused notion of this had prevailed all along in the Church; but it was connected with the idea, that certain means must be used to obtain the benefit, and among others, a careful study of the written Word, and prayer. In short, that we must be *active* in our endeavours after the attainment or gift. But some of the ancient mystics, like the Quakers, assumed it as a maxim, that we must *passively wait* for the gift, and that all active exertions of our own faculties were prejudicial to us in the matter. Hence it was laid down, that we must *wait in silence*—not merely an external silence as to the use of words, but an internal silence or suppression of any voluntary arrangement of our thoughts and meditations. In this state, the Divine influence was expected to come in its own time and manner; and *then*, if the person so moved, should give utterance to his thoughts or feelings, his expressions were considered equivalent to what was spoken of old time by the inspired prophets, and received accordingly as the Word of God by the Church.

Under these impressions, the Quakers meet together as other Christians do, on Sunday; but they sit in silence, to see if any are "moved by the Spirit," and if this should happen to none, they dismiss at the appointed time without a word having been said. When the Spirit moves any of them, however, to give a word of exhortation or instruction to the brethren, it does not appear to any neutral witness, that there is any thing in the matter to warrant the idea of inspiration. It consists just of such things as are usually said in other churches, modified by that personal or corporate spirit, which prefers certain topics and a certain phraseology, to which they have been habituated, and to which they are partial; and, after all, as in most cases of extemporaneous preaching, it consists chiefly of passages from the *written Word*, assorted under

some general head, or connected by some short remarks.* Now it is obvious upon reflection, that such a practice may indeed preserve habits of thinking and feeling *once established*; but it must be extremely unfavourable to any new ideas, or *progress*. The Quakers may say, to be

* I have confined my remarks on the doctrine of the Spirit, or Divine Influence, to the views taken of it by the Quakers. But as some of my readers may have doubts or confused ideas on the subject, I subjoin some brief observations which may perhaps assist such persons in forming a more correct idea of the doctrine. It is frequently obscured by confounding the fact with the *mode* of the thing. These, however, are different matters, which admit and require different sorts of evidence.

The *fact* may be established from the testimony of Scripture, the reasonableness of the thing, and experience. The *mode* is a question of theory, and men will be biassed in their opinions of it, by their theories upon other topics, and by their habits of feeling and reflection. Now with regard to the fact, we observe—1st, It is needless to quote texts of Scripture to prove, that *it* speaks of the Holy Ghost as a gift offered to Christians, and enjoyed by many; this is notorious; but it may be alleged, that these passages of Scripture refer to the miraculous gifts which were peculiar to the first promulgation of Christianity. We think, however, that it included a moral influence, which is equally required in every age, and therefore the subject of a permanent provision; the very names given to it—holy spirit, spirit of truth, of consolation, of joy,—imply this and the precepts of encouragement given to *ask it*, are of a general and not of a temporary character. 2d, The reasonableness of the thing is obvious, from the consideration of the natural ignorance and moral weakness of mankind; and from the belief, that Divine Providence is interested in the moral improvement and happiness of his intelligent offspring. This sentiment lies at the bottom of all religion—of all worship and praise addressed to God. 3d, With respect to *experience*, there have been men esteemed good in all ages, who have directly or indirectly borne witness to the fact; and it is particularly worthy of remark, that many of the greatest philosophers or wise men of antiquity, are among the number. *They* do not seem to have been troubled with that apathy or scepticism on the subject, that is so prevalent among the literati of modern times. Among others, Socrates and Antoninus, expressly testify of their own experience and belief. We grant, that many false and ridiculous claims have been made to inspiration; but they are easily distinguished from what we speak of, by this test, that they do not bring forth those fruits of moral purity, and of clear intelligence, from which characteristics the Spirit of God is designated as a spirit of *holiness*, and of *truth*. With respect to modern times, and among sober Christians, there are plenty who have

sure, that if new ideas were requisite for their edification, they would be communicated by the Spirit; but it is remarkable that no such communications have been made for a century. We find no forward progress in the doctrine of their writers, nor in the verbal discourses of their

borne witness, and are willing to bear witness to their experience of this heavenly gift; but perhaps some one will allege—we know many respectable Christians who would say, they have no experience of any such thing; and why should not their testimony be considered as good as that of others? Our reply is, that by the doctrine of the Scripture, we are taught that none may expect to enjoy the gift, unless they earnestly, habitually, and individually pray for it; and unless they cherish and improve the first measures of it which they receive, that they may be worthy of obtaining *more*. Now, will our objector assure us, that his friends have done this? None others can be competent witnesses but those who have thus made the experiment; and I am not aware of any Christian (being otherwise of respectable character) who has testified or will testify, that his attempts in this way have been fruitless. The apathy, or the prejudices of many Christians, who are kept away from enjoying their privileges in this respect, because some have made false and ridiculous pretensions to it—this prejudice should go for nothing with all candid minds.

We come now to the theory. One class of men who are partial to the belief, that God carries on all his designs by the operation of general laws, and not by special interposition, may suppose that the sensible experience which they have had of a salutary moral influence on their minds after prayer and worship, is the result of the natural constitution of our minds; by which we are made to feel pleasure on the conscious exercise of good desire, disposition, and conduct. Well, suppose it so; what is the matter whether this be the *whole* truth or not? provided such a worshipper of God is convinced that the moral sentiments enjoined by Christianity, regarding God, such as veneration, love, confidence, &c. are the sublimest virtues of humanity, and worthy to be cherished and cultivated with the utmost care. Such a man must practically feel, that by so doing, he approaches nearer the Divinity. He knows more of God, he appreciates his character, he has a community of sentiment with him—in a word, he is inspired by his Spirit; at least, as one man is inspired by the spirit of another, whom he loves, and admires, and follows. This is one theory.

A second theory supposes, that the subordinate administration of God's moral government in this world, is confided to good angels who go about unseen to us, and operate upon the minds of men in favourable circumstances, to produce salutary impressions, and to confirm good habits and

speakers. On the contrary, there is a manifest tendency to fall back into the old evangelical views of the Atonement, and some other topics. But without insisting upon this, it is at least assumed by modern Friends, that the primitive Quakers had attained to the perfect conception and true notion of Christianity more than a century ago.

desires. Or, the whole of such operations and influences are ascribed more directly and in chief, to one great Spirit, being a distinct agent and person from, or under, God the Father, but over other inferior ministering angels.

A third theory is, that the influence and guidance in question, is direct and immediate from the Deity himself; and the difficulty of conceiving how, or wherefore, God should take such a special and personal interest in the conduct and character of millions of obscure individuals, is answered, by saying, “that such an objection is the mere result of our limited faculties and experience, which cannot comprehend the operations of an infinite mind; just as our faculty of sight and attention is necessarily limited to a small sphere near us; while the sun, if we supposed *it* to be a physical organ of vision to an intelligent mind, could look abroad on the whole earth, or on all the solar system at once, and perceive every object as distinctly as when revealed by its own rays of light to a bystander.”

This view of the matter seems to be countenanced by the language of Christ, who constantly ascribed *his* wisdom and *his* power to the immediate agency of his heavenly Father; and as Jesus was a pattern of perfected humanity, we may infer that the influence by which we hope to be made like him, is the same in kind, though less in the measure or degree of our experience. Perhaps there may be so much truth in all these theories. We are certain, for instance, that in the more ordinary course of nature, many ultimate ends of Providence are effected by fixed general laws; others by the agency of man; and others again by the direct interposition of God, as every believer in revealed religion and in the truth of ancient miracles must admit. Or, we may take as an example of this direct agency, the act of creation, when man was first made, and the world was moulded into its present form for his use. In like manner, and in his moral government, God may employ various means as he thinks fit, although we cannot distinguish the limits and diversity of their operations. That is to say, the Divine influence of which we speak, may be that of a moral sentiment and sympathy—or of the agency of other intelligent beings—or it may be the direct power of God, as the nature and importance of the matter requires; but whatever we may think of such *theories*, the main thing in *practice*, is to be persuaded of, and pay due attention to the *fact*, and by so doing, to reap the benefit of it.

This presumption, however, of their primitive *perfection*, will not be easily admitted by any one who is sensible in how many respects the human mind has made progress for the last hundred years.

Perhaps some of my readers may think that I am wasting time in attempting to remove this prejudice; but such is my esteem for the society of Friends, on account of their having professedly adopted our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, as the practical guide of their conduct; that I would fain arouse them to a consideration of the causes why they have not succeeded in extending and establishing the doctrine of that discourse, more than they have done; for, if *their views* of Christianity had been *perfect*, they were destined to extend and to prevail.

The Society of Friends have been for a long time freed from any such external impediments of persecution, as at one time retarded their progress, yet still they are making no proselytes. Indeed, they do not seem any way anxious or zealous about making proselytes. They appear to think that there is a bustling and selfish zeal for such purposes, that is rather to be avoided; but though that is true, Christianity is nevertheless essentially, a system of propagandism. It was the express command of its Founder to his disciples, *to go and teach all nations*. They were to be the "light of the world"—"the salt of the earth;" and, independent of positive precept, its sentiment of benevolence, should inspire its votaries with a zeal to communicate the blessing of its principles to all men. Whence, then, the indolence and apathy of the Quakers? I fear, they have found an interest and gratification in keeping their numbers limited; not, I believe, avowedly and consciously, but secretly and unawares.

There can be no doubt that the Society, considered as a well-organised body, having some peculiar maxims even of worldly and commercial policy (very good maxims of their sort, we grant), have an advantage in being limited in their numbers; of being well known to each other, and

connected by peculiar ties. What else is the practical use of adhering to the verbal phraseology of past ages, to the colours and forms of garments worn by their great-grandfathers? It may be all very well to recommend simplicity and sincerity generally; but if I am converted to these and other principles of true Christianity, why should I take as my model of simplicity, the fashions of all or any parties in the reign of William the Third, any more than the fashions of chaste and simple people in the reign of William the Fourth?—or, why may not I, or my posterity, or some other sect, found a chaste and simple fashion in the nineteenth century, as well as people might do in the seventeenth or eighteenth? How will such old fashions have any peculiar tendency to promote the sentiments of Christianity, more than others?—or, will they, like the once-famed garb of the Franciscan Friars, be supposed to serve as a passport to heaven?

No sensible Quaker will be so absurd, as to say or think such a thing deliberately. But even while things of that sort may be alleged to be of a minor and accessory nature, the consequence of incorporating them practically, although indirectly, into the doctrine and customs of a society, cause them at length to be regarded as a part and parcel of their system. And as every Christian Church is intended professedly to be a specimen and prelude of that pure society which shall be constituted in heaven; therefore, whatever is considered as an habitual part of such association on earth, comes to be regarded as equally related to the heavenly society. In other words, men are always found to place a good deal of their religion, in the peculiar customs and opinions of their sect; to the prejudice of the more important and genuine principles in which it ought to consist. This is a general remark; but it applies to the Quakers like other bodies of men; and whatever may be the number of individuals among them, who are superior to such contracted views—and I am willing to admit such a number may be as great as the

friends choose to assert—yet still, when it comes to the matter of making converts, these peculiarities stand in the way, and assume the character I have given them.

If, for instance, I cannot be admitted into the Society of Friends, without wearing a broad-brimmed hat, and drab-coloured clothes—without substituting yea, for yes, and thou, for you—without renouncing all other modes of worship, but that of silent waiting—without being allowed to speak of the influence of the Spirit, except in a peculiar phraseology—*then*, to all practical intents and purposes, such things constitute, or seem to constitute, their religion; but to such things being regarded as Christianity, I, and thousands more who may otherwise think favourably of their principles, have an invincible, and, as we think, a rational ground of objection.

Let me beseech any of the Society of Friends who may read these pages, to reflect on the above remarks, and while they may continue as individuals and families to adhere to their own tastes and customs, let them make a public distinction between such matters, and the essential principles of their Society, which ought to be those of pure Christianity and nothing else. If they would do this, and endeavour with due zeal to propagate such essentials of the Christian doctrine, I have no doubt that they would meet with distinguished success. Their general views (in spite of these peculiarities) have stamped their society with the character of benevolence, of simplicity, and sincerity; and this would go a great way to recommend the doctrine which has produced such good fruit—namely, *the doctrine of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount*. But if Friends will not do this, let others do it. It is the one thing needful; for the great defect in all the Protestant Churches has been, that with all their Reformation and progress, they have not yet come to the true foundation and peculiar characteristic of Christianity, as exhibited in that Sermon. They do not, and they cannot, controvert the doctrine of a benevolent Deity and a benevolent Morality; but

they have overlooked it, in the multitude of other things engrossing their attention, and they have in many instances adopted opinions and practices inconsistent with it.

I have traced the progress of opinions and sentiments in the bosom of the Church, through the most considerable members of the Protestant sects, at least, so far as regards the subject of our argument. There are a few minor modifications of their opinions and sentiments, with the notice of which we shall close this branch of our investigation. Among them, we may advert to the doctrine of *Universal Salvation*.

It was contended so far back as the time of Origen, by that great man, and by many of his followers, that the doctrine of *eternal* punishment was inconsistent with the benevolent character of the Deity, and that the passages of Scripture which seemed to assert such doctrine, ought not to be interpreted in their more literal and obvious sense. It appears, however, that the doctrine of eternal punishment had been the more general opinion among the early Christians; and after the notions of Origen on this and other topics had been pretty warmly contested in the succeeding century, they were put down, chiefly by the influence and authority of Augustine; nor was the doctrine of Universal Salvation again revived till after the Reformation.

We cannot fail to remark, how these circumstances correspond with, and illustrate a doctrine which we have repeatedly stated—namely, that in the early ages of the world, and in times of ignorance, men were slow to believe in the Goodness of God. Even among the philosophic Christians of the second and third centuries, who were familiar with the literature of Greece and Rome, few were found whose minds were competent to the conception; and when the dark ages came, the doctrine was merged completely, like many other things, in the gloom of intellectual night. For the same reason, it was only among

a few scattered individuals that the idea was cherished for a considerable time after the Reformation; and it was not till within this half century, that societies of Christians made it the professed and chief object of their testimony, to assert the Universal Salvation of all men; or their final restoration to happiness, as a necessary inference from the *unquestionable benevolence* of God. These societies are known by the name of Universalists; and their opinions, to some extent, are entertained by many other Christians, who either do not openly profess them, or make them a conspicuous object of their testimony.

So great has the difference of modern sentiments generally become, in favour of the Divine benevolence, (as an abstract doctrine,) compared with the sentiments of the ancients; that instead of men's minds requiring to be excited and assured of such doctrine, as in old times, they require to be regulated or restrained. Many men of a philosophic cast of mind now allege, that it is a natural sentiment to the human mind to believe the goodness of God—that is to say, that it did not require, and was not indebted to revealed religion for its development; while others, who admit the fact of revelation, have gone the length of inferring from it, that there shall be no future state of punishment at all; but that sin shall be destroyed with the body, and the new man raised in purity. This view has been adopted by several Churches of Universalists, especially in America.

These ultra views of the doctrine of the Divine Goodness, teach us this important lesson, *viz.* “that while a virtuous and benevolent mind may find reasons to satisfy *itself*, that the Judge of all the earth will act justly and *mercifully*, in a future state, as well as in this state of being, towards even the depraved part of his offspring—yet it is not convenient to preach such doctrine indiscriminately, to many who are incapable of making good use of it; nor is it respectful in us, to assert how, and what, God shall do in the matter, seeing it is not revealed.”

In this respect, we think the Universalists err; and it is from the same cause that all the other parties have erred; and that is, from not studying the Christian doctrine in its original enunciation and entireness, as delivered from the lips of Jesus its author. *He* indeed teaches the doctrine of the Divine Benevolence; but it is not as an abstract and speculative notion, serving to guide our minds about *distant* subjects. It is as a truth for *immediate* influence on our hearts and conduct—an object for direct and distinct imitation; as exhibited in the precepts, the example, and the manners of Christ, who is “the image of God’s moral attributes;” of such attributes operating upon the present affairs, and circumstances, and duties of humanity. No man can have a proper idea of the Divine benevolence, who has not familiarised himself with those displays of it, which are to be seen in the detailed doctrine and character of Christ. And no man has, or will so familiarise himself with such things, unless he endeavour “to purify himself as Christ was pure.” If he remain in sin, he cannot discern the moral beauty of our Saviour’s character and doctrine. If it should happen to be casually forced upon his approving notice; the glory of it, will either make him follow the light in future, or it will drive him from the contemplation of the subject; because, it fills him with shame and remorse, at the contrast of his own unworthiness or wickedness. In these respects, there is a great difference between the doctrine of the Divine benevolence, as applied only to determine the probable fate of other men in another world; and as applied to excite and to direct our own immediate and individual conduct; and when we find any class of religious people engrossed with the first and abstract view of it, and making it the subject of their public testimony, while the second view, as detailed in the practical precepts of the Christian morality, is overlooked, or coldly assented to, as a beautiful theory *if it were practicable*—we are constrained to say, that such persons are defective in their ideas of the doctrine.

In these remarks, as in former ones upon other parties, we must not be understood as reflecting on the individual character of professed Universalists; but the doctrine of every school which is *partial*, which omits the paramount consideration of practical and personal benevolence, as the supreme lesson and object of their *associated testimony, and labours*; such doctrine is defective as a just exhibition of Christianity.

The last class of Christians whom we shall take notice of, is that of those Independent or Congregational Societies, who profess in all things strictly to follow the manners of the Apostolic Churches. This practice leads them in some instances, to pay a more strict regard to the precepts of Christ than many other Christians do; for example, in considering all their members as brethren at their meetings, having no distinguished or separate seats for rich and poor, and in ministering to the wants of their own poor brethren, on a comparatively liberal scale.

We cheerfully give them praise for such things; but it is notorious, that many, perhaps most of those Societies do, upon the subject of atonement, justification, eternal punishment, and ceremonial observances, fall under some of the classifications which we have already considered; and so far, they show that their adherence in certain cases to the Morality of the Gospel, is not so much the result of a true understanding of it in all its bearings, as of an incidental coincidence, resulting from other and partial impressions.

CHAPTER VIII.

BESIDES the peculiar turn which the Reformation gave to the religion of the Protestants, and the check which it put, on the corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church,

it had another distinct character and effect. It was a successful effort in the cause of civil liberty, and gave the first impulse to that series of revolutions which have since maintained and propagated the principles of constitutional and free governments in Europe and America. It is true, that before the Reformation the barons of several of the Kingdoms of Europe had limited the power of their monarchs; while the kings in order to support themselves, had courted the people, and introduced the third estate of representatives into the legislative assemblies. So far, the elementary foundations of the new system were laid, but it was not carried forward upon any fixed principles. The quarrel between the kings and the barons, was either compromised as in England, or ended in the subjection of the nobles to the royal power, as in Spain and France; after which time, the representatives of the people were dismissed, or disregarded. It was not till the Reformation, that the principles of liberty and constitutional government were publicly discussed.

“ We may observe (says an author who treats on this subject), that the authority of the Church before the Reformation, being strictly conjoined with the authority of the State in some places, and in others, altogether confounded with it; it was impossible to examine and discuss the rights of the one, without extending the investigation also to the other. Men inquired, by what authority the Popes pretended to raise up and cast down kings? and this naturally led to the inquiry, by what authority kings were originally set up? And when the rights of the Church and State were thus discussed, the rights of the People came next to be inquired into. It being ascertained that the community, as a religious association or church, had a right to choose its own pastors and to adopt its own creed; it seemed to follow, that the same community as a political association, had a right to choose their own magistrates, and to form its own constitution. The Emperor (Charles V.) opposed the new religious

creed; and men then inquired, if in matters of faith they ought to obey the Emperor? In 1531, the faculties of law and theology in the University of Wittenburgh, answered unanimously in the negative. From the limit of that obedience which was due to sovereigns, and of that resistance which may be opposed to them, and which was a subject of general discussion, this maxim was established, "that by the help of God oppressors may be deposed." Such language, before Luther, had never dared to be spoken explicitly and aloud in Europe; but he feared not to utter great truths, and he set many others in the same road. "No one (said Luther) had yet taught or heard—no one knew anything of the secular power, whence it was derived, or what was its object. Persons of the greatest learning regarded the temporal power as a profane and sublunary thing. Even many good princes and lords were so prone to piety, that they accounted their power as something pagan and impious, and hence became priests and monks, in everything but the hood.

* * * Besides this, the Pope and the Clergy were all in all, above all, and over all, as God himself in the world; and the civil authority was thrown in the back ground, oppressed and unknown. * * * Hence they accuse me of being a seditious person, because I have vindicated the secular power." "Luther indeed had the merit of being the very first man who wrote with freedom on politics in modern Europe. * * * And what advantage do the nations at this moment derive from the light thrown on the nature of government, by the speculations and disclosures of private individuals? It is worthy of attention that everything, almost without exception, which has been done to illustrate the principles of government, has been done—not by men engaged in government, but by private individuals."—(*Viller's Essay on the Reformation.*)

This is an important remark. It shows, that from this period, the primary springs of political improvement and

events were less the result of the accidental conflicts of opposing parties in the state, than of public opinion, slowly formed indeed, by individual discussion, but ultimately acting with irresistible force. This benefit indeed may be imputed to the press, as the direct instrument of diffusing opinion; but the liberty of expressing opinions on political subjects, and the motives for it, were not the less, consequences of the Reformation. It followed naturally, that where the religious principles of the Reformers were adopted, those of civil liberty also prevailed; and *vice versa*, when the one was quashed so was the other; witness the contrast of England, Holland, and the north of Germany; with Spain, Italy, and France before the Revolution.

Now this assertion of, and support given to, the principles of civil liberty, was unquestionably favourable to the progress of society; and perhaps it constituted the principal merit of the Reformers. In so far as they attacked the corruptions of the Church, on the grounds of justice and of civil rights, they were entirely in the right; and it was this conviction, and the motives of worldly interest, ambition, and policy, frequently connected with this view of the subject, that obtained for them the support of many princes and nobles; and that roused the feelings of the people against the gross oppression and delusion which had been practised on them. The men who put themselves at the head of such a popular insurrection against tyranny, and who frequently suffered by so doing, were venerated by the people; and hence every opinion which such chieftains propagated, and every practice they enjoined, not only respecting the civil rights of mankind, but also in regard to their spiritual interests, were received for a time almost implicitly.

We have no wish to derogate from the real merit of the Reformers; but it is of importance to bear in mind the true character of their actions, that we may not blindly applaud them when they had no title to it, and thus pro-

pagate their errors. Their service and their mission was in the cause of natural and political justice, rather than that of religion; they were better statesmen than theologians, and much more original and clear in their ideas of politics than of religion. Accordingly, while their theology has undergone, and must yet undergo, much modification, or rather reversal; their doctrines of liberty and justice have served as a foundation on which subsequent authors have written, and statesmen have acted. And if in one important instance, posterity has condemned their politics—namely, in the case of intolerance, it was because in that instance they were corrupted by a false theology. In other respects, however, the science of political justice continued to be cultivated and developed on the same principles which were advocated by the first Reformers. To Luther, who composed “A Treatise on the Civil Magistrates,” and other similar writings, a multitude of authors succeeded; who discussed the same topics in tracts and treatises, which were celebrated in their day, but which were generally too much tinctured with the vehemence and animosity of the parties who contended with such fury in those times. In process of time, these gave way to the better regulated productions of sage and profound minds, who discussed the subject upon large and philosophical views, and independent of the petty interests and passions of contending sects and parties. Of these were Grotius, Puffendorf, and Locke. To the latter, especially, we owe the ultimate triumph of the doctrine of Toleration, as it was then called, or more properly of perfect mental Liberty. This result was a greater revolution than that effected by Luther, because it went to the bottom of the matter, and was attended with none of those evils flowing from the conflicts of parties, who wished only freedom to themselves, while they refused it to others.

We have ascribed the progress of liberty and right sentiments of political justice, to the impulse of the Refor-

mation; but we have not said that this is to be ascribed to the peculiar opinions or conduct of the Reformers individually, or as a party. We wished to characterise the era generally, and doubtless many other things and other persons contributed to form its character. The invention of printing, the revival of learning, the progress of the arts and sciences, the discovery of America, and of a new route to the Indies; such events as these all tended to expand the human faculties, and to direct their attention to many objects which had been neglected in the dark ages. But the object and plan of our Essay will not permit us to enter into these varied views.*

My design has been to show, that the Reformation, in its origin and effects, was in respect of ecclesiastical affairs more properly a crisis, destructive of abuses, than constructive of a true and permanent system; and so far as its general principles were sound and definitive, it was only concerning that system of justice and liberty, through which society indeed must pass; but in which, it cannot find its ultimate perfection and repose. In other words, the Reformation did not embrace the sentiments of Benevolence, either in its theological or social views. The world was not yet of age for such sentiments. The human mind, after a slumber of about ten centuries, awoke nearly in the same state of education and experience as it had been left in the sixth century. The principles of Justice required first to be illustrated and established, before those of Benevolence could be properly appreciated and practised; and impelled by the moral instinct suited to the age, and by the active spirit which it had engendered, the Reformers took their station and fulfilled their temporary mission in the great scheme of Providence, and in the progress of human education. But they did no more. It

* The reader may consult on this head, the Essay formerly quoted (Villers on the Spirit and Influence of the Reformation), where he will find a lively sketch of the subject.

belonged to future ages to carry forward the work, and to fall under the further influences of an expanding intellect and improved morality.

Let us now take notice of certain objections which have been urged, or which may be felt, against that contrast and distinction between the principles of Justice and Benevolence, to which I have so frequently referred. It has been said, that the sentiments of benevolence may be all traced to and ascribed to the radical principle of Equity—that by the study of equity, even heathen philosophers discovered and approved many sentiments which I have classified under the head of benevolence, and that in such respect it is unfair to describe them as peculiar to Christianity. It has also been said, that all our moral sentiments are primarily the result of our physical constitution and organisation; and that men having separate faculties of justice and of benevolence, in the same manner as they have of memory and imagination, it is chimerical to expect the one to be swallowed up by the other, and false philosophy to represent them as opposed and contrasted in their influence or effects. Others are disposed to reduce all our moral sentiments to the radical one of Justice, and to look for the perfectibility of society, by the prevalence of perfect institutions and ideas of Political Justice.

Some explanation on these points are required, because we are now approaching the stage in which our doctrine will be opposed, or in the opinion of some rivalled, by such views of equity, of justice, and of physical organisation.

It may be remarked, therefore, that it has not been my purpose in this Essay, to propose any metaphysical or ethical arrangement and exhibition of the various faculties of the mind, and of their operations and sentiments. These may be all reduced to the principles of equity, or justice,

or organisation, if you please; and their connections and dependencies may be classified systematically, and accordingly. The order which I have adopted, is merely the order of their development, as affected by the circumstances in which individuals and society at large have been actually placed. And the distinctions we have made, are purely of a practical and visible kind, displayed in the influence and effects of one principle as compared with another, when either of them are predominant. Our arrangement, in that respect, is rather popular than philosophical, but it serves its purpose. In the same manner, and even among our objectors, the terms equity, and justice, may not be philosophically different; but in popular and even legal language they are distinguished; *justice* being frequently limited to the definitions or decisions of law, *equity* to the dictates of conscience or feeling. Let us not, therefore, have any dispute about words, when we know in what sense they are used.

With regard to the fact, of many of the sentiments of benevolence having been expressed and approved of by the heathens, I never meant that benevolence was so exclusively peculiar to Christianity, that it was not to be traced in the writings of the older prophets, nor in the philosophy of the ancients. Its foundation being laid in nature, and its sentiments in accordance with the dictates of enlightened and unprejudiced reason; we are so far from being surprised or offended at the fact referred to, that we regard such a circumstance to be a strong evidence of the truth of Christianity.

Our doctrine about its peculiar characteristic, is also practical and popular, rather than abstract and theoretic. It amounts to this: "Christianity has brought forward the principles of benevolence in such a prominent manner—so unmixed with other matter which might distract the attention—enforced by such powerful motives—made the end of all its subordinate parts—and aiming at a distinct consummation through a specific plan and particular

means, that we are fairly entitled to say, Benevolence is the peculiar characteristic of Christianity; and that Christianity has had the merit of originating almost all practical schemes of benevolence, and preparing the minds of mankind for its more extensive prevalence."

As to the objection, arising from the organic constitution of man; "that he must always be governed by the faculty of Justice, because he has a particular organ of it"—the conclusion is unwarranted. The animal propensities or faculties are supposed, by the same objectors (the Phrenologists), to be connected with the organs of the brain; and yet they will not say, that Man, either as an individual or in society, is destined to be always under the governance of animal propensities. It is the object and effect of education and experience, whether private or social, to teach us to subject our animal faculties to the intellectual and moral. Individuals have accomplished this, and in nations there is a vast difference between the savage and civilised, in this respect; yet their organic constitution remains nearly the same. I say *nearly*, because it will be contended, that in savage nations, and among the negroes and Indians particularly, the proportion of their animal and intellectual organs, are different from, and inferior to the civilised Europeans. But while this proves that there is a variety in the human species, the origin of which is not easily accounted for; I am not aware that the ancient Romans and Grecians, or the modern Greeks and Italians, who are in general inferior in intellectual and moral culture to the French and English, have had on that account, less visible development of the correspondent organs of the brain. All these nations are considered as of the same family, or variety; and if we make a comparison between people in different degrees of civilisation, it ought to be made, between nations of the same variety in the species.

Thus, to take another illustration; we know that the Europeans, four or five hundred years ago, steeped in the

sentiments of chivalry and constantly in arms, were excessively quick in their resentments, and pugnacious in their dispositions. The manners and tempers of modern times, have changed in that respect, in favour of peace and politeness: have the visible development of the pugnacious organs of moderns decreased in consequence? If you say, they are constrained by custom and the force of public opinion, rather than changed in their physical form; *then* we see that animal propensity may be subdued by the force of circumstances; it can be reduced in its active operations and influences. Now, just so, with the faculty and organ of justice in its evil excess; that is to say, where it demands *all* its *rights*, and will *yield none*; for such is the popular idea of it, and its practical character, where it has been the *governing principle*. We say, that this faculty can be, and ought to be, subordinate to the faculty of benevolence, in so far that we should in many cases be content with *less*, and be ready to give *more* than justice. Benevolent men have done this, and are willing to do it more extensively; and as it will be granted by our objector, that all men have an organ or faculty of benevolence as well as of justice, the case between them is exactly parallel to the one between the intellectual faculties generally, and the animal propensities. The duty of man is to govern his conduct by the higher principles of his nature; and if all men are not equally capable of this, "*they must be constrained by custom, and the force of public opinion,*" just as they were in the matter of their "*pugnacity.*"

It would, indeed, be a great error, if we made no account, of Man being constitutionally subject to the influence of animal propensities and of selfish justice; and consequently to imagine, that the world might be left entirely to the influence of benevolence. But such is not our doctrine. It is only, that the principle of benevolence is destined and capable of *preponderating* in society, and that in consequence of such preponderance, joined with

other means arising from the power of justice, and from the influence of natural passions, all acting in proper harmony and subordination; the consummation which we expect, shall be realised; while it could not be accomplished otherwise.

With regard to the third class of objections, we observe again, that the influence of the Reformation or the character of the era arising out of it, was that of Justice—of its definition and establishment, in a great many matters regarding the private rights of men—regarding the public relation of the different orders of the State to each other, and of the various states and nations of Europe, viewed as members of a great social confederation. This system and its principles have not indeed been as yet perfected; but sufficient experiments have been made and speculations published, to enable us to decide how far it can go; and to prove that it must in due time give way to some other system, before society can arrive at that state of improvement or perfection of which it is capable.

Among these experiments, we may refer to the Republics which were attempted in England and France, and to those which have been established in America. It was proved by the experiments in Europe, that the people of England and France were not capable of acting, or of being governed by those disinterested principles which were proclaimed by the philosophers and legislators of the republican school. *Their* constitutions, however, were the beau ideal of the reign of *justice* and *equality* among men. Republicanism has succeeded indeed, better in America; that is to say, it has found fewer obstacles from the prejudices and pretensions of any privileged orders; and it may continue to preserve the people from many of those abuses which have been associated in Europe, with her monarchies, her aristocracies, and her priesthood. But after all, will any one say, that society in America is what it ought to be? or what we would wish it to be? All the consequences of selfishness—

lawsuits, party spirit, the tendency to a very unequal distribution of wealth; and therefore all the evils of extreme poverty and riches, together with the indulgence of gross animal passions—these and similar evils, are and will be totally untouched by the best forms of political government, and by the most perfect administration of legal justice.

Some political philosophers, sensible of this, have endeavoured to point out the cause, by alleging that all the defects of this sort to be found in society arise from our ignorance or inattention to the true principles of Political Justice. They extend such principles to the very foundation of morals, and make every instance, even of benevolence and of equity, an act of justice. In an abstract and philosophical point of view, this may be true enough; but in a practical and popular view, mankind will never agree about what is just and unjust, in this extensive sense, and in all their complicated relations to, and dealings with each other. Speculations concerning the perfectibility of society, resting upon the expectation of making all men see and do what is just in every instance, have therefore, always appeared to the sober class of mankind as Utopian; and their conviction is well founded. All history and experience confirms it; and a careful examination of the reasoning of such political philosophers will expose many fallacies in it, which vitiate their conclusions, even in theory; while in practice, their argument is at other times reduced *ad absurdum*. We shall give some proofs of this remark from Godwin's Political Justice, which made so much noise in the literary and political world at the time of its publication.



CHAPTER IX.

GODWIN denies the truth of the remark, "that it is in vain to expect all men, to agree in all cases, about what is *justice*, in regard to the interests or views of opposing individuals; and consequently impracticable to act upon all occasions consistently to its alleged dictates." He contends that men *may*, and that they *will* in progress of time come to a perfect agreement and practice; and that the chief obstacle to this arises from the artifice and erroneous systems of politics, of morals, and of religion, which have hitherto prevailed in the world. I will not deny the baneful effects of such corruptions in many instances; but surely if these had been the sole causes, we might have expected that in the United States of America, where, since the publication of Godwin's book, men have enjoyed the benefits of Political Justice in as great perfection as they could desire; in these States, I say, we might have found the practical evidence of his doctrine, if it had been true.

I am aware that our author stipulates for this condition—namely, that the people must be previously well instructed, before they could reap the benefits of his improved Political Institutions; and perhaps he might say, the Americans are not yet sufficiently instructed. But granting that this might in part account for their defects, yet still I contend that if the improvement of Political Institutions in the way supposed had really possessed so much influence on private character as it was expected; we ought to have found the effects visible and unquestionable to a considerable degree in America.

But let us contemplate the subject even in the view most favourable to our philosopher's doctrine. He himself gives us a picture of what should be the operation of Justice,

and by which we may judge of its character and tendency. He supposes, "that in that happy state of society to which mankind shall have arrived, when the nature and obligations of justice are properly understood; there shall be a sort of community of goods, every one freely giving to another what he does not require for himself. Thus A. having occasion for the use of a table, applies to his neighbour B. for the use of his table. B. has also *some* use for it; but they sit down to discuss the comparative importance of each other's necessities, and to decide who shall have the table—not as a matter of *favour*, but of *right!*" Again, he supposes "the Archbishop Fenelon and his chambermaid to have been in equal danger by a fire in his palace. *Query*, which of them should accept the *first* means of safety to the risk of the other being left to perish? To this it is answered, let Justice determine. Let the maid consider the vastly superior value of her master's life to mankind—the splendour and utility of his literary labours—and she will immediately decide in his favour;"—while Fenelon upon the same principle decides in like manner, and so takes the poor maid at her word!

Who is there that does not perceive the utter impossibility of men so *agreeing* in all cases about such matters of controversy, even allowing them to be most sincerely desirous of deciding *justly*? The difference of position from which they may view a subject—the different degrees of knowledge which they possess concerning it—the difference of their capacity in understanding the matter—all these circumstances would lead to various judgments and interminable disputes. The very absence of all selfish feelings (if that were possible, when a man pleaded his own cause), would only render the controversy more obstinate and tedious; for selfishness *may* cause a party to *yield* from motives of fear or prudence, but a rigid adherence to *justice* must oblige a man to support its claim *tenaciously*, if it appear on his own side, as well as to admit it, when it appears on the side of another.

Let us suppose, in the instance quoted above, that the chambermaid knew nothing of literature or its value, and consequently that she could not comprehend the great superiority of her master's claim on that score. At the same time, she might think that he was an old man, and must die soon at any rate—he was rich, and would leave his family well provided for. On the other hand, she was young, and might live many years—her parents were poor, and depended on her for support—perhaps she had a lover, who would be inconsolable for her loss—and last of all, she might be the mother of as great a man as Fene-lon. Would not a conclusion in her own favour, and with such impressions, appear to be equally *just* with that of the Archbishop? Must all these considerations be explained, and enforced, and weighed, before the parties could decide on the line of conduct to be pursued? How absurd and ridiculous! There, they would stand disputing till the flames perhaps devoured both of them. But if they were each desirous benevolently and voluntarily to yield the preference to the other, the matter might be decided in a trice—both may be saved—at all events they would part with mutual sentiments of love and esteem.

Such theoretical speculations of Godwin, and others of the same school, combined with the practical experiments of politics which have been made these three hundred years past, may be regarded as having completed the efforts of Political Justice in favour of what it can do for mankind; yet still society is left full of vice and misery; not so bad indeed as formerly, but bad enough. I do not mean that the effects and benefits which may be derived from improved political institutions and ideas are yet exhausted; they will extend to more countries, and they may be farther improved and consolidated in the freest nations; but we can now appreciate their character and issue, and in that point of view we can determine, that they are inherently defective. This view of the matter opened to the mind of Godwin himself, in the progress of his specu-

lations; and since he wrote, the same idea has engaged the attention of other philosophers and philanthropists. What struck him particularly, was the evils of an extreme and unequal distribution of wealth among the members of society—a thing which is wholly independent of political laws and institutions, both in its origin and progress. Perhaps we cannot illustrate the operation of this evil better than by making some extracts from our author's chapter on this subject. It may be regarded as the incipient symptoms of a transition in the human mind from the consideration of Justice to that of Benevolence.

“ And here with grief (he says) it must be confessed, that however great are the evils produced by monarchies and courts—by the imposition of priests and the iniquity of criminal laws; all these are imbecile and impotent, compared with the evils that arise out of the present system of property. * * * Excessive inequality of property brings home a servile and truckling system by no circuitous method to every house in the nation. Observe the pauper fawning with abject vileness upon his rich benefactor. Observe the servants that follow in a rich man's train, watchful of his looks, anticipating his commands, not daring to reply to his insolence—all their time and their efforts under the direction of his caprice. Observe the tradesman, how he studies the passions of his customers, not to correct but to pamper them—the vileness of his flattery, and the systematical constancy with which he exaggerates the merit of his commodities. Observe the practices of a popular election, where the great mass are purchased by obsequiousness, by intemperance and bribery, or driven by unmanly threats of poverty and persecution. * * * We have heard much against visionary and theoretical improvements. It would indeed be visionary and theoretical, to expect virtue from mankind, while they are thus subject to hourly corruption, and bred from father to son, to sell their independence and conscience, for the vile rewards that oppression has to bestow. * * * Here

religion comes to the aid of our argument. Religion was the ebullition of generous men [so our author condescends to suppose] who let their imagination loose on the grandest subjects, and wandered without restraint on the unbounded field of inquiry, whence they brought home some of the sublimest views which intellect can furnish. It teaches that the true perfection of man, is to be above artificial wants—to have no sensuality, and no fear. * * *

The existing system of things, directs all the efforts of mankind to the acquisition of wealth. The ostentation of the rich, perpetually goads the poor by the spectacle, to the desire of opulence. The rich man stands forward as the only object of general esteem and deference. In vain are sobriety, integrity, and industry; in vain the sublimest powers of the mind and the most ardent benevolence, if their possessor be narrowed in his circumstances. To acquire wealth and to display it, is therefore the universal passion. * * * Excessive wealth is in reality a premium paid to ignorance—an immense annuity expended to keep the world in ignorance: first, the rich by the false views in which they behold every thing; and next the poor, for want of means and leisure, to acquire useful knowledge. It deprives the rich of the most salubrious and effectual motives of activity, to render them dissipated and indolent. * * * On the other hand, look at the peasant and labourer, working till their understandings are benumbed with toil, their sinews contracted and made callous, being for ever on the stretch—their bodies invaded by infirmities, and surrendered to an untimely grave. And what is the fruit of all this disproportioned and unceasing toil? At evening they return to a family famished with hunger, exposed half-naked and half-sheltered to the inclemency of the weather. * * * One man's possessing in abundance, that of which another man is destitute, is the fruitful source of crime. We must change the nature of mind, before we can prevent it from being powerfully influenced by this circumstance,

when strongly brought home to its perceptions by the nature of its situation. * * * Hence an open contention of the strength and cunning of one party, against the strength and cunning of the other. * * * The spirit of oppression, the spirit of servility, and the spirit of fraud; these are the immediate growth of an extreme inequality in the distribution of national wealth; and other vices become inseparable, envy, malice, and revenge, not to speak of violent offences against life and property," &c. &c.

With such views of the evil, Godwin has no clear idea of how it can be remedied. Having listened to, and stated the objections arising from the obvious difficulty in the way of *practicability*, and even to the *danger* of an abortive attempt, by plunging society only back into anarchy; he adds, "but what is worst of all is, that if this objection be true, it is to be feared there is no remedy." He is contented with an attempt to prove, "that if the idea of equality were once established, it might be preserved." But how establish it? He admits that it cannot be "the result of accident, of the authority of a chief magistrate, or the over-earnest perseverance of a few enlightened thinkers—it must be produced by the serious and deliberate conviction of the community at large." Still the question recurs, how is this conviction to be produced? and to that he gives no answer. The truth is, that viewing religion as he did, "as a mere generous ebullition of ardent and imaginative men, who by chance hit upon sublime truths," his mind was shut against the perception of that power, and those means of religion, by which *it* is able, and is destined, to accomplish the desired consummation.



Attempts have been since made, to solve the question by particular plans or views; but without any apparent or probable success, and all, as I presume, for the same reason, *viz.* from ignorance of that theory which we have

been endeavouring to develope, and from a disregard to Divine Providence, and the means which he hath appointed by the Christian religion, to accomplish the end. The plans and views to which I have alluded are falling into oblivion, or giving way to others of a similar character, and therefore may not seem to some readers worthy of my specific attention; but while I do not attach much consequence to them abstractly, yet as they occasionally exhibit some glimpses of truth, and belong to the history of the human mind in its progress towards its proper destiny; I think the consideration of them belongs to our subject, and may be handled so as to throw light on it. The first of these sort of Reformers to whom we refer, is Owen.

Nobody who is acquainted with the history of Mr. Owen can doubt his benevolence. His eccentricities and his practical errors, arise from an undue regard which he entertains for one specific means by which he endeavours to accomplish his object; that is, “the force of circumstances.” His favourite doctrine is, “that man is the creature of circumstances;” and to a considerable extent it is true enough, but not absolutely. To expose the errors of his system therefore, the best way is to examine the doctrine of “circumstances.”

Among other circumstances which affect the character of men, are the following—1st, their birth in a certain age or country, by which, of course, they are subjected from their infancy to the habits and opinions prevailing among their neighbours.—2. The condition of their parents, as belonging to the class of the poor or the rich.—3. The domestic education which they may receive individually. All these and other similar *circumstances*, have an undoubted influence in forming our character, habits, and opinions. And so far as all these kind of things are artificial and accidental, they are capable (*if evil*) of being remedied by human contrivances; and this is what Mr. Owen proposes to do. But he forgets that these are *circumstances* of Nature’s making—in other words, of God’s arrange-

ment, which we have no power of altering, and which have an extensive influence on the character and condition of men.

1. Every man is necessarily ignorant, inexperienced, destitute of fixed character, and under the preponderating influence of animal feelings and propensities in his infancy and youth.—2. He is surrounded by temptations, to prefer his present and more palpable interests, to his remote and invisible ones—the present to the future life in particular; and this constitutes his state of *probation*.—3. He is *especially* exposed to the temptations of preferring his own individual interest to those of others. Self-preservation and gratification are the first laws of nature, and from these spring that selfishness, which, in its ramifications and excess, includes every evil quality or habit.

Now all these are *circumstances* which we cannot remove from the condition of humanity, in the first instance. We can easily conceive how our Maker, if it had so pleased him, might have brought and placed intelligent beings into the world, in different circumstances from ours—circumstances like those which we quoted on a former occasion from a certain philosopher (as supposing), and which might have secured the immediate happiness and virtue of mankind. But it is evident that Providence has formed *his* plan with respect to man, not on the view of *immediate* but of *remote* effects, and therefore arranged his circumstances accordingly. But perhaps a disciple of Owen's might here reply—"Granting what you say to be true, still it is our business to overcome the natural disadvantages of our situation, and we have power to do so."—Yes, and from that very fact I will prove Mr. Owen's error. I infer from that fact, that man is the *creature* of *genius* as well as of *circumstance*. He comes into the world with all nature arrayed against him—she provides no food fit for him, as she does for all other animals; no clothing, no shelter, no natural weapons of defence or of offence, in the general war of the animal kingdom. Man is the most

helpless being in creation—all circumstances are against him, none in his favour; yet by the power of intellect and genius, he forces nature to yield and become tributary to him. In the language of Scripture, he is born to “subdue the earth.” This power is indeed most palpable in its effect when exerted collectively and socially, but the elements of it are in every man, although in different degrees.

Every man hath as truly a power to modify his own circumstances, as Mr. Owen can have of modifying the circumstances of other men, and we are constantly in the habit of using such power individually. What right has Mr. Owen to assume that he has a monopoly of this power? Admitting that his scheme of modification is good for certain purposes, and deserving the support and co-operation of others, in carrying it into effect—still it is absurd in him to expect, that other individuals may not, and will not exercise their inherent power when they choose, either for good or evil. In this respect man is not wholly the creature of circumstances.

Hitherto I speak of the elementary power of man’s *genius* or intellect; but he has another faculty besides that—he possesses a *moral power*, and feels its responsibility. Mr. Owen makes no account of this neither; or rather, he infers from his doctrine of man being “wholly the creature of circumstances”—that he has no moral responsibility at all—that he ought neither to be rewarded nor punished, applauded nor reproved. This is just in other words, the doctrine of necessity, in opposition to that of free-will. Now without going into the philosophical intricacies of that controversy, I contend that it is practically false, in such an application of it as Mr. Owen has made. It requires no process of reasoning to establish this. We know instinctively that we do well in some actions, and ill in others. Our conscience informs us at once, and we are as much bound to believe its dictates in such instances, as any other first principle of truth.

We are not able to enter into any argument about free-will or necessity, or about any thing else, without laying down some first principle or truth, on which to build our argument. These first principles themselves admit of no proof; they are self-evident by their own light. Now the consciousness we have of being capable of right and wrong, is one of those first principles which I will not argue. I am entitled to take it for granted—I know it has its limits and may be misguided; but it extends at least to the consequence of our responsibility—that is, of our suffering pain or pleasure, as we are regulated by a *regard* to it. It is this property which it possesses, that makes it the most powerful instrument of influencing the conduct of men, and of inducing them to alter or modify the “*circumstances*” which affect their character and condition. It follows, therefore, that man is the creature of *conscience* and of *reason*, as well as of “*circumstances*;” and all schemes of governing mankind by the sole influence of the last single element of his character, without regard to the two others, are unnatural and impracticable.

Mr. Owen complains, that the clergy have endeavoured to govern mankind exclusively by the power of conscience, and without regard to that of circumstances. There is much truth and importance in this complaint. The clergy have gone just as far to the one extreme, as he wishes to go to the other. They make no allowances for the difference of men’s moral, as well as intellectual capacities—for their education and condition in life—for the opinions and manners of the age in which they were born. They apply one rule of judgment and of duty to all indiscriminately, and attempt to operate the moral improvement or salvation of men by the single power of conscience. They have consequently failed, and will always fail, till they learn to combine the three powers together, and to allow each its proper sphere and influence.

*Most principles are not un-
derstood*

The second Reformer to whom I allude is St. Simon.* He was a French writer who died in 1825, but had seen all the scenes of the Revolution, and was impressed with the idea, that something beyond the schemes of politicians was requisite to secure the happiness of society. He was convinced in particular, that the great mass of society—the poor or working classes, were too much overlooked in all schemes of Government; whereas their welfare, as being the most numerous order of society, ought to have been the chief object of solicitude to every wise and benevolent Government. Seeing, however, that it was in vain to expect this from the ordinary principles of politics, he admired the moral doctrine of Christ, which taught, “that all men should regard and love each other as brethren;” and upon this basis he saw (although obscurely) that a social system might be reared, which would possess all the characteristics which he desired.

In following out this idea, however, he was misled by a certain prejudice, natural enough indeed to a person who had lived in a Roman Catholic country. He assumed a distinction between Christianity as it is to be learned from the New Testament, and as it was taught by the Church. He did not regard the personal doctrine of Christ to be “a definitive revelation,” but supposed it to be susceptible of a further development by that sort of vague inspiration which the Catholics ascribe to the

* The extravagances into which some of his disciples (the St. Simonians) have fallen, and the doctrines which they have lately attempted to promulgate in London, are such as may induce some of my readers to suspect that I am trifling with them, in introducing St. Simon to their notice upon this occasion; but such readers will please allow me to inform them, that *he* did not teach the obnoxious doctrines of a community of women, or the capricious dissolution of marriage. The writings and opinions of St. Simon, published in his lifetime; also those of his earliest and most confidential disciples, contained in a Journal conducted by them (*Le Producteur*), bear the stamp of profound learning and talent. They contain likewise many original and just remarks on the history of society, and on subjects of moral and political science.

CHURCH COLLECTIVELY under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. His conception of this doctrine was however more after the manner of a philosopher than of a priest—he had a greater reference to the expanding faculties of the human mind, than to any supernatural influence belonging officially to the Clergy, as a privileged order of men; but *practically* this led him into a similar train of sentiments. It confined his view to the doctrine of the Church, rather than to that of the Gospel; and in this point of view he remarked, how in certain practical influences which the Church displayed in the middle ages, (and of which we have spoken favourably in some former chapters,) it was at once adapted to the growing age of the world, and at the same time contributed to that growth. He was especially struck by the influence which the Church had in abolishing slavery, and in erecting a spiritual power by its hierarchy, capable of controlling the discordant elements of society in the turbulent period of the middle ages, and preventing it from utter destruction. He was sensible however that in process of time the nature of this power became obsolete and unsuitable to the circumstances of the world; in consequence of which the Reformation of the sixteenth century became inevitable. But while he admits the necessity and benefits of the Reformation in destroying the old system and its abuses, he accuses Luther of having attempted, or rather of having made a retrograde movement in many instances, instead of a forward one; but not in the same manner that we have regarded the subject.

He looked upon the Reformation and the reformed doctrine therefore, only as a provisional or temporary system, during the crisis of a grand revolution, or transition from the reign of theology and feudalism, to that of a new era; when society should be placed upon a permanent basis under the influence of a definitive morality—a morality which indeed he calls Christian, in reference to its origin and its connection with some of the precepts of

Christ; but in reality he regarded it as a new discovery of, or revelation to the human mind, and particularly to himself. He supposes all those instances of *progress* in society which we have ascribed to the leaven of primitive Christianity, to have been *later* discoveries and developments of the human mind itself.

His disciples have carried things still farther. They consider their master as having had a mission analogous to those of Moses and of Christ. Some of these leading men are evidently priests, or at least strongly imbued with certain prejudices of Roman Catholicism. They have an antipathy to Protestantism, and on one point I grant that it is not without some cause—that is, on account of its divisions and sectarian spirit. The St. Simonians contend strongly for a unity of doctrine, as being essentially necessary to the peace and repose of the world. *There* they are right; but they propose to accomplish this and other objects, by a new Clerical Hierarchy, upon the model of the Roman Hierarchy, as regards its forms and operations; but having for its object the happiness and moral improvement of mankind, and especially the lower orders, *in this life*, more particularly than in the next—of which future happiness indeed, they say little, probably supposing, that the one will be a natural result of the other.

The qualifications and functions of this new Clergy and its Hierarchy are not to be confined to theology and spiritual matters, in the ordinary sense of the term. They speak of it indeed as a *spiritual* power which is destined to supersede the *temporal* power; but it is to be the voluntary influence of reason, of science, and of morality, over the spirits of men; in opposition to the influence of *force* and *fear*, by which political governments are upheld; and for this reason their Clergy are to contain men of science, and even distinguished artists, merchants, and manufacturers, as well as theologians.

These men they consider as the natural chiefs of so-

ciet̃y, whose interests and feelings are consolidated with those of the general mass; and it is expected that the people may be induced to devolve voluntarily upon them, the public confidence; with authority to manage various affairs for the general good, even to the distribution of the wealth produced by the industrious classes; and which wealth, the Clergy would bestow upon every man according to *his merit*. In this distribution, I suppose, of course, the Clergy would consider themselves as a very meritorious class of citizens.

We have no reason to doubt the benevolent motives of these men, any more than those of Mr. Owen; but they are carried away by an exaggerated and abstract view of some special points of doctrine. Their scheme of getting men to submit to the general government, and even to the domestic and private interference of a set of priests in all their affairs—in the very application and distribution of individual wealth, is extremely absurd. Such a scheme, even if it could otherwise be practicable, would give rise to temptations, of covetousness, and ambition, which no body of men could resist; but it is needless to expose such palpable errors.

CHAPTER X.

THESE ideas of Owen and St. Simon, however, are the incipient dawns of those moral sentiments and faculties which are destined ultimately to govern society; as they ought, or as they do, in the case of individuals, who have acquired wisdom by experience, or by the lessons of sound philosophy. We remarked shortly, and at an early period of our discussion, that the world had now arrived at that stage in which it was prepared to make a transition from the reign of Justice to that of Benevolence, as it had in

other instances done from the empire of authority, to that of political liberty, and right. Our historical sketches have traced the marks of this general progress of society, and furnished particular evidence of the doctrine. The appearance of such men and of such schemes as those of Owen and St. Simon in the present juncture, corroborate the doctrine. Political Justice having nearly fulfilled its mission, or at least having sufficiently developed its tendency and power, the mind of man is prepared partly by the expansion of its faculties, and partly by some urgent necessities, to look about for something better. It requires new means and new principles to heal the disorders of society, and to fulfil those instinctive desires and anticipations which men have always felt, for something fairer and better in their condition, than has ever yet been exhibited in the experience of past history; and especially in extensive and populous countries.

But such men as Owen and St. Simon have failed in their schemes and erred in their views, because they did not take into account the doctrine and aids of Christianity. The latter indeed admitted the truth of Christianity, but then, he regarded it as a discovery or development of the human mind belonging to that age of the world in which it was promulgated, and hence destined to be superseded by farther revelations of the same sort—that is, revelations of truth, by the natural process of the expanding faculties of man, or of society. Under this view, he represents the abolition of slavery as forming the only direct object and mission of Christianity with respect to the state of society; and he, or rather his disciples (since his death) regarded himself as the principal organ of a farther revelation, springing in due season from the advanced state of the public knowledge and experience of modern times, and adapted to them. The same idea, without relation to any individual as its particular organ, prevails among that class of theologians in Germany who have been called Neologists; and we grant that, under certain limits, it is a

natural development of the human thought, aided by the force of circumstances. But we deny that Christianity was analagous to this, either in its origin, its means, or even as to some of its ends.

Christianity owed little or nothing to the previous discoveries or sentiments of mankind in moral science or habits; for, as to the Jewish prophets, we hold *them* to be identified with the same system of supernatural revelation which Jesus professed to complete. And as to the sentiments of Benevolence of which modern philosophy boasts—whether as applied to our conceptions of the divine character, or to the duty of man—these sentiments unquestionably belonged to Christianity, or rather, as we have attempted to prove, formed its very essence and peculiarity. Particular philosophers may not have consciously and directly borrowed them from Christianity; yet it is clear that the doctrine having been thus propagated before their day, they are not entitled to represent it as a new revelation of, or to, the human mind, in its natural progress, and by natural means. Whether mankind in the natural and unaided progress of society, would have ultimately arrived at the same results, is a question which it is not needful for us in our present investigation to determine. It is enough for our argument to insist on the matter of fact, that the doctrine of Benevolence was propagated by Christ eighteen hundred years ago, preserved among his disciples, and to a certain extent diffused in society; and that his doctrine on that subject, when studied with all the lights of modern discoveries and experience, is equal (we might say, superior) to any modern system which has been proposed.

We next infer, that the intelligence and the goodness which taught mankind this lesson so long ago—so long before it was, or could be discovered by man—was likely to understand its import better than *we* can; likewise to devise better means to give it effect, and finally to direct it to the best ends. This is the ground on which

we assert, that Christianity is an institution adapted and designed to accomplish the moral improvement and regeneration of society; and therefore, that in labouring for the same purpose, we shall act wisely in availing ourselves of its instruction, of its aids, and its influences. It is true, that I am obliged to show positively, how we can proceed under its guidance to make farther progress than has been hitherto effected; and how for that purpose, it is, or can be adapted to the circumstances of modern times; and this must be the course and object of our future discussion.

Meantime, our first object was to arouse the attention of professed Christians to the true character and design of their Master's doctrine—to show to political philosophers the favourable tendency and influence of Christianity upon society, notwithstanding the obstacles it had to contend with—to discriminate between its false forms and true spirit, and to obviate the objection which arose from a general misapprehension of its nature and design. We trust that the remarks which we have made on the Moral Constitution of Man, and the historical sketches which we have given in evidence and illustration of it, have had a tendency to accomplish the object we had in view. If this shall appear to the satisfaction of my reader, he will be prepared to believe that Society is capable of an improvement, and Christianity of a triumph, far beyond anything that has been hitherto effected—that each, in fact, have only been in their infancy, and are destined to grow together to maturity—that we are approaching this era, and that if Christians could once be impressed with the idea, that such practical effects ought to be the great end of their *associated labours*, they would be able by their numbers and influence in society, to do a great deal; and at no very distant period to accomplish all that we have specified.

The great obstacle to this desired consummation, as far as regards Christians (and here we speak even of serious

Christians) is, that their public or associated labours have been all directed hitherto towards the salvation of men's souls in a future state; and with such a view, to establish particular dogmas of faith, forms of government, ceremonies, and privileges. Look at their creeds, canons, and institutions. Are they not filled with and composed of such things? If they chance to contain any thing relating to the conduct and interests of men in their social state, that is only a subordinate and incidental matter. The saving of the soul—the mode of propitiating or coaxing the Deity (as it were) by *forms of worship*, are the paramount object of attention; and in order to frighten men to become their proselytes, and to keep their votaries steadfast, they are threatened directly or indirectly with damnation, if they swerve from the path chalked out for them by their spiritual directors.

Let us not be misunderstood; we do not mean to speak slightly of the salvation of the soul in a future state; but we think, that the surest means of securing our salvation in future, is to save ourselves in the present life, from the effects of ignorance and vice. Neither do we underrate the peculiar means and motives which Christianity furnishes for our individual salvation, in any state or extremity; but we think that the knowledge of such things is in every man's reach who possesses, and can read the Gospels; that every Christian is perfectly competent to be his own prophet and priest, and requires no associated aid, neither any authoritative direction, from any man, or set of men, upon such topics. But we all stand in need of the countenance and aid of others, *to practise the precepts of Christ*. On that ground, we cannot stand alone; we require *associations* for that purpose; and such should be the *chief object* of all gospel churches, or associations of Christians.

The time is now arrived, or ought to be, when in all matters essential to individual salvation “none require to teach his neighbour, saying, Know ye the way of the Lord; for all may know it, from the least to the great-

est." It is no longer now, as it was in the primitive Church, when few could read; when manuscripts were scarce and dear; when the doctrine of a benevolent Divinity was opposed to the spirit of the age; and when the Christians were a small, despised, and persecuted sect;—in such times the *first* principles of religion required to be inculcated verbally and frequently, and in the assemblies of the brethren; while the consolations of a future state, were all their support, and the attainment of individual salvation, almost all that was practicable. But now, when circumstances are so much changed, "we ought to leave first principles and go on to perfection; not laying over and over again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith in Jesus Christ, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of the resurrection and of judgment to come;" but rather, "forgetting the things which are behind, let us press forward to those things which are before, even to the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ"—*the reign of God on earth, as in heaven.*

We have admitted that there are great difficulties and obstacles in the way; but they are not like the difficulty felt by Godwin. We can easily conceive how Christians may be brought to understand the true doctrine of their Master; and when they do know what it is, if they will not practise it, they may be compelled to give up their pretension of being his disciples. It will appear palpably absurd, in the eyes of an enlightened public, for such people to call themselves Christians. It is not meant that all nominal Christians could, or would act constantly, and individually, in consistence with the precepts of their Master; but a habitual and public disregard of the most essential part of Christianity, could no longer be sheltered under a show, or zeal, about theological dogmas—ceremonial observances—and a legal obedience—which things have hitherto passed in the world as Christianity—the veil would be torn asunder, and the disguise would no longer deceive. We say, the power of truth is able to accom-

plish so much; and when that shall be done, there will be found a steadfast band of true devotees to genuine Christianity, who will have all that power of principle—all that zeal—all that activity which is inherent in her original character, and which she has uniformly exhibited and maintained under many disadvantages—who will turn all her energies (we repeat) to the accomplishment of her true destiny—the salvation of *this world* from ignorance, vice, and misery.

Yes, this is the power which Philosophy and Political Justice do not possess—a power which has given abundant proof of accomplishing vast things, and which “is not the result of accident, nor confined to the authority of magistrates, nor to the over-earnest persuasion of a few enlightened thinkers, but which can produce a serious and deliberate conviction on the mind of the community at large.”

With regard to the means by which this power should be organised for the purpose; by which the impediments of external institutions, and of internal prejudices or interests may be overcome; these and many collateral questions and topics require a careful consideration. They are not like the matters we have hitherto discussed—subjects of experience and observation. They are questions of prudence and calculation; and many persons who may be convinced of our general doctrine, might find objections to its specific application, in cases where they themselves were concerned. For such reasons, I am disposed to postpone for a time these speculations about futurity. I shall be glad in the meantime to learn the impression which may be made, by what is already advanced, on the minds of persons differently constituted or circumstanced; and hope, that the consideration of our general views and principles, shall pave the way for the better understanding and for a more ready agreement, with such practical schemes as may be afterwards proposed.



The reader will have remarked, that the general views maintained in this Essay, lead substantially to the expectation of a condition of society, which has been described in reference to prophecy, as the Millennium. The idea which I have of such a condition and period, however, differs considerably from what has commonly been entertained by the advocates of the doctrine in general. This difference will appear more distinctly, when we come to treat of the positive and particular details of what we expect in futurity; but I wish before we conclude on this occasion, to offer a few remarks upon the views and opinions of some persons who have lately endeavoured to excite attention to the doctrine of the Millennium. I refer to those who expect the personal advent of Christ, and consequently the introduction of a Miraculous Era.

Far be it from me to assert, as some have done, that there shall in no case, be any more miracles wrought. We cannot tell what exigencies may arise, or how far it may be requisite that some new and extraordinary evidence in favour of pure Christianity may be given—for instance, to the Mahometan and Heathen world—whose prejudices are equally strong, and more just, against what has been called Christianity, than were the prejudices of the Jews and Gentiles in the time of antiquity. But the question is, have we, professing Christians, any ground for expecting such things in order to accomplish views which we previously cherish and maintain in reference to ourselves? I think not; and especially when such views extend to a system of *permanent* miracles or interference with the ordinary laws of nature, and the constitution of man; for such would be the effect of the visible residence and immediate agency of Christ, in the government of this world. We should no longer live by *faith*, but by *sight*; there would be no more room for the exercise of patience, of candour, of disinterestedness, in our belief of, and attachment to the doctrine of Christianity. Under such a system, all

men would be forced to feign subjection. It would be madness to disbelieve, or to offer open resistance. The reigning influence would be *fear* and *force*, of a moral kind at any rate, if not physical—it would no longer be *truth* and *love*. But would not this be a return “to the weak and beggarly elements of this world,” instead of an advance to those sublimer principles, in which (as we have seen) the true glory and character of the kingdom of God consist?

This consideration alone, connected as it is with the views we have taken of the natural and destined *progress* of society and of true religion, appears decisive to me against the expectation of the common Millennarians. As for those passages of Scripture prophecy which seem to speak of the personal reign of Christ in the present world; it would be easy to show, by the general analogy of Scripture, and by the experience of past times, that they ought to be explained in reference to the actual triumph of his original doctrines and precepts.

Indeed, they cannot otherwise triumph, than by a free, rational, and willing choice on the part of his subjects; tested and tried by opportunities, and motives, equally free, in reference to other masters and principles. It would be a downright contradiction to assert, that men can be constrained by any kind of *force* to *love* God and man; such is not the plan of Providence; as it is written, “thy people shall be *willing* in the day of thy *reign*.” But agreeably to the general method hitherto pursued in this Essay, we do not enter into any detailed controversy of this kind. It is enough to state general arguments, and to take notice (as far as we recollect, or know them) of such general objections and prejudices as affect our doctrine.



